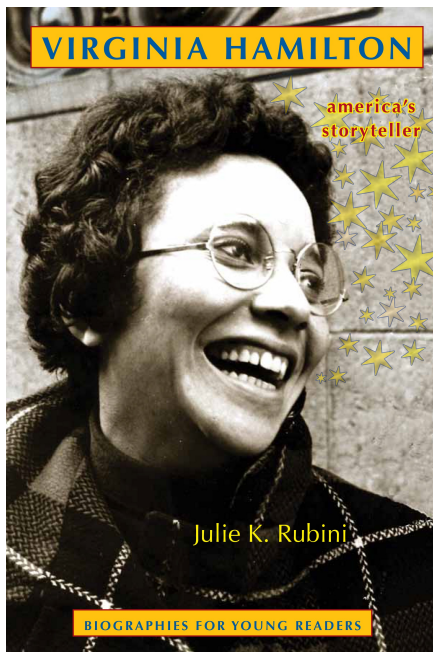


A Curriculum Guide for Educators & Readers

Aligned to the Common Core Grades 4-8



Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller* as a classroom read aloud or as a selection for independent reading. Great for book clubs, too!

About the Author

Julie K. Rubini is the founder of Claire's Day, a children's book festival to honor her late daughter. She is the author of *Hidden Ohio*, *Missing Millie Benson: The Secret Case of the Nancy Drew Ghostwriter and Journalist*, and the upcoming *Eye to Eye: Sports Journalist Christine Brennan*. But most of all, she cherishes her roles as wife to Brad and mother to daughter Kyle and son Ian. To learn more about Julie, visit her at www.julierubini.com.



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About the Book

Long before she wrote *The House of Dies Drear*, *M.C. Higgins, the Great*, *The Planet of Junior Brown*, *The People Could Fly*, and many other children's classics, Virginia Hamilton grew up among her extended family near Yellow Springs, Ohio, where her grandfather had been brought as a baby through the Underground Railroad. The family stories she heard as a child fueled her imagination, and the freedom to roam the farms and woods nearby trained her to be a great observer. In all, Hamilton wrote forty-one books, each driven by a focus of "the known, the remembered, and the imagined"—particularly within the lives of African Americans.

Over her thirty-five-year career, Hamilton received every major award for children's literature. This new biography gives us the whole story of Virginia's creative genius, her passion for nurturing young readers, and her clever way of crafting stories they'd love.

Common Core Aligned for Grades 4-8

4th grade: ELA. RI.4.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.4.1,2,3; SL.4.1,2,4; L.4.4,5

5th grade: ELA. RI.5.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.5.1,2,3; SL.5.1,2,4,5; L.5.4,5

6th grade: ELA. RI.6.1,2,3; W.6.1,2,3,4,7,8,9; SL.6.1,2,3,4,5; L.6.4,5

7th grade: ELA. RI.7.1,2,3; W.7.1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9; SL.7.1,2,3,4,5; L.7.4,5

8th grade: ELA. RI.8.1,2,3; W.8.1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9; SL.8.1,2,3,4,5; L.8.4,5

Before You Read...

1. Take a close look at the cover photograph of *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller*. Describe what you see. What are your first impressions of this person?
2. Read the text on the back of the book. What do you learn about the biography from these blurbs? What questions do they raise?
3. Using all this information on the back of the book, can you make any predictions about what you might learn about Virginia Hamilton?

Reading Nonfiction

While reading *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller*, have students take notes using the table below. They should pause before each page turn to add notes to the columns. These columns can either be done individually or hung on the board and worked on as a class.

Things We Learned (Facts)	Questions We Have	Answers We Found

Once the biography is read, discuss the *Questions We Have* column.

- Were any of these questions answered as the book went along?
- If so, ask students to find the answer within the text.
- Record the answer next to the question in a third column labeled *Answers We Found*.

For all remaining questions in the *Questions We Have* column, that have yet to be answered, students will need to take the steps to find answers.

- Discuss how to find answers to questions through research.
- Assign students to specific questions to help them focus.
- Record all answers in the *Answers We Found* column.

After the answers have been shared with the class, engage in a discussion on research practices.

- What was most difficult about finding answers?
- Was it easier to find answers on the Internet or in a book?
- Which source is more reliable, the Internet or a printed book? Why?
- How can you determine whether to trust a source?

Everything that we read or hear is filtered through the person who is writing or speaking about it. This person will be writing or speaking from their own point of view or opinion. This is called bias. The reports might be accurate, but the

information is filtered through the writer's own beliefs and opinions. Both reports will be biased.

Does this mean we shouldn't trust any information? No. It means that we need to be thoughtful and careful when we do our research.

Julie Rubini has received recognition for her research and extensive back matter, much of which utilizes primary sources such as letters and interviews. While you read, pay close attention to when a primary source is used.

What tips would you give someone who is about to do research?

Chapters 1-2

1. Using specific examples from Chapter One as evidence, explain how Virginia is influenced by her family regarding storytelling.

- a. Create Virginia's family tree, based on information given in Chapter One.

2. What is "Rememory," according to Virginia?

3. In your own words, describe Virginia's family members:

- a. Mary Cloud
- b. Levi Perry
- c. Etta Belle and Kenneth
- d. Brother, Bill
- e. Cousin, Marlene

4. Locate Yellow Springs, Ohio on a map.

- a. Visit www.yellowspringsohio.org, as well as doing more research on the area. How do you think it has changed since Virginia was a child? In what ways do you think it has stayed the same?

Who is Virginia Hamilton?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Virginia, on a large piece of paper.

As you read this book, write any known details about Virginia inside the outline.

Outside the outline, record any questions you may have about Virginia.

- b. Create a travel brochure about Yellow Springs. Include information about its history, demographics, as well as interesting events and places to visit.
 - c. Describe Yellow Springs's history regarding slavery, African American families, and racism.
 - d. How do you think civil rights injustices impacted Virginia? Use specific examples from the text as evidence where possible.
5. Based on the information given in Chapter Two, create a yearbook entry for Virginia Hamilton, stating her accomplishments and involvement in school.

Making Connections:

Virginia Hamilton's family had a strong tradition of oral history. Much of what she knew about her family was passed down through generations in storytelling.

Take a story that is often shared in your own family. Maybe it's a tale of struggle or humor. It could be something about you or a recounting from before you were born. Rewrite this story as if you were going to share it with a group of people that you want to impress. Make sure to exaggerate and embellish where needed.

Chapters 3-4

1. Explain how the following played into Virginia's path to becoming a famous author:
 - a. The Tearoom
 - b. Antioch College
 - c. The Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation
 - d. New York City
2. Name some of the jobs that Virginia worked to pay her rent in New York City.
3. Imagine that you are Virginia and write a diary entry about the night at the Five Spot Café when Arnold asked for her number. Be sure to expand upon the details in Chapter Three to really make the evening come to life.

4. Do an image search of old tenement buildings in New York City and their floor plans. Then, based on the information in Chapter Three, create your own floor plan of Virginia's apartment.
5. In what ways does Virginia draw from her own life's experiences to write *Zeely*?
6. How did Mildred and Richard Loving make Virginia and Arnold's marriage possible?
 - a. What is so significant about Arnold's first picture book *black is brown is tan*?
 - b. *black is brown is tan* is still in print. If possible, find a copy and create a book trailer to get others to read the book.

Making Connections:

Moving can be tough, but it can also be exciting. Imagine that your family is going to be relocating. Write a goodbye letter to your old town. Include what you are going to miss and what mementos you will pack with you. Also, include what you look forward to in the new town. What are you excited or curious about? What are you scared or anxious about? What do you wish or hope about your new home?

Chapters 5-6

1. Using pages 49-51 as inspiration, imagine that you are Virginia, writing to one of your dear friends back in New York City about your daily life in Yellow Springs and what you and your family are up to.
2. Read the description of Arnold and Virginia's house in Yellow Springs. What does each detail tell you about the people who live inside?
 - a. Now write a description of your own house.
 - b. What do each of the details in your house say about the people who live there?
3. Visit www.virginiahamilton.com to read Virginia's Newbery Medal acceptance speech. What do you think are the most important takeaways from her speech?

4. Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter and write an article about the significance of the Newbery Medal, *M.C. Higgins, the Great*, and the first black recipient. Also recount the highlights of Ms. Hamilton's speech.

Making Connections:

Visit www.thewilds.columbuszoo.org to see what happened to the land that Virginia Hamilton wrote about in *M.C. Higgins the Great*.

Then, research the Surface Mining Control and Resurfacing Act of 1977 to better understand how the preservation came to be.

Once the information is gathered, create an illustrated poster about the Wilds, include information about Virginia's novel where applicable.

Chapters 7-8

1. Look up the current winners of the many awards Virginia Hamilton won, including The Newbery Medal, Edgar Allan Poe Award, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, National Book Award, Coretta Scott King Award, etc. Have you read any of the winning titles?
2. Explain in your own words what you think Virginia Hamilton meant when she said, "When you find yourself up against the wall enough, you begin to calculate your endurance against the wall. You begin to know how strong you are. You are beautiful, and you think in terms of going through the wall."
 - a. Do you have any walls you have been up against in your life? If so, what and how will you go through that wall?
3. Visit www.ccbookawards.com to view the past winners of the Children's and Teen Choice Book Awards. Have you read any of the books that have won the award from the past five years? If so, which ones?
 - a. If you were to vote on your favorite book today, what would it be and why?

4. Using Chapters One through Eight as evidence, explain why you think members of the Kent State University English Department decided to establish The Virginia Hamilton Lecture on Minority Group Experiences in Children's Literature.
 - a. Visit www.kent.edu/virginiahiltonconference to view information on the next Virginia Hamilton Conference.
 - b. Create an itinerary of which keynotes and workshops you would attend and explain your choices.

Chapters 9-10

1. Virginia traveled to several countries as a children's author. Her first major trip was to the Soviet Union as part of the Second International Conference of Writers for Children and Youth. Although she didn't take many notes, create a scrapbook of her travels using the information in Chapter Nine as evidence. Include maps of where she went, thoughts on what she saw, and photos of places she visited.
2. What was it about the play, *Maximka* that disturbed Virginia?
 - a. What does she do about how she feels?
 - b. Do you think a play like *Maximka* would be performed today? Why or why not? If so, what changes might be made for today's audiences?
3. What does Virginia Hamilton mean when she calls her work "Liberation Literature?"
4. What does Virginia mean when she said, "maybe this year I was too successful?"
 - a. List some of the ways that Virginia balanced her home life with her work life.
5. What is the Hans Christian Andersen Award and when did Virginia receive it?
 - a. Visit www.virginiahilton.com to read excerpts from Virginia's speech as she accepted the Hans Christian Andersen award. What do you think are the most important takeaways from this portion of her speech?
 - b. Who is the current winner of the Hans Christian Andersen award?
6. Explain how the following sums up Virginia: "She was the days and nights put together." Use evidence from the book, in addition to the many quotes from Chapter Ten about Virginia Hamilton to support your answer.

Making Connections:

Virginia overcame a lot to be such a successful author.

Write a thank you letter to her surviving husband, Arnold Adoff, sharing how her accomplishments inspire you.

After You Read...

Below are a few final project ideas for the conclusion of *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller*.

1. Having now read the biography, design your own cover, pulling in many elements from Virginia Hamilton's life.
2. Several important historical events are mentioned throughout *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller*.

The Underground Railroad	The Civil Rights Movement
The Ohio Civil Rights Act of 1959	The Loving Court Case
The Cold War	The Berlin Wall

Choose one of these events on which to base a 500-word essay.

What can readers take away from *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller* in relation to this event?

3. Create a book trailer for *Virginia Hamilton: America's Storyteller*. Carefully choose music, visuals, and words to create an overall feel for the book.
4. A eulogy is a speech that is often given at a funeral to highlight the key events of a person's life and their legacy or what they leave behind. Write a eulogy for Virginia Hamilton.