The Journey That Saved Curious George

Book Overview

World War II had just started. Hans and Margret Rey were German-born Jewish artists living in France. As Hitler’s tanks rolled into Paris in 1940, the Reys escaped on bicycles. In one bicycle basket were the Reys’ drawings and story of a mischievous little monkey with the French name Fifi. The Journey That Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H. A. Rey is the exciting and inspiring story of how the Reys and Fifi made it to New York, where Fifi became Curious George.

The Journey That Saved Curious George introduces elementary and middle school students to a major event of the twentieth century: World War II. Students will learn about the time period from the many primary sources throughout the book, including photographs, passports, and diary pages. Louise Borden’s text captures the tension in Paris in 1940 and the urgency to escape, the uprooting of lives, and the difficulty of leaving a place you love. At the same time, this story is about the creative process—the inspiration, joy, and constant work that went into creating the curious, lovable monkey.

Allan Drummond’s delightful illustrations enhance the narrative and are full of teachable material. This guide provides you with ideas for exploring the Reys’ true story through discussion, examination of primary source material, research, and written and oral projects.

Before Reading

Ask students to share what they know or remember about Curious George. You may want to read one of the books, such as the original Curious George, Curious George Rides a Bike, or Curious George Gets a Medal. Have students pay attention to the illustrations. Return to the illustrations after students have read The Journey That Saved Curious George. Have them note what the Reys took from their own lives and put in their Curious George books, such as Hans Rey’s pipe, their love of animals and zoos in particular, their life among palm trees in Brazil, and their departure from Europe on an ocean liner. For more information about Curious George, visit www.curiousgeorge.com.

The story of Curious George was born during a turbulent time in history. Research some of the themes of World War II. Help students understand that it was called a world war because so many countries fought in it; the battlefields stretched across Europe, North Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. The Reys were two of the millions of Europeans whose lives were affected by the conflict, especially because they were Jewish. An explanation of the danger faced by Jews in Europe will help students understand why quick escape was so important.

During Reading

Guiding Discussion Questions

• What are the descriptive words Borden uses to give readers the flavor of Hamburg, Germany, the Reys’ birthplace? How are Hamburg and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, similar and different?

• Look at the items on pages 22 and 23. If you wanted to write a story about the Reys and Curious George, what information could you gather from these primary sources?

• Look at a map of France. In which direction did the Reys travel when they left Paris? Why might it have been too dangerous to stay in France?

• What do we learn about the “largest motorized evacuation in history” from the Reys’ journey? What were the hardships of the trip?
After Reading

Make a Timeline
For lower grades (Grades 3–4):
Students make an illustrated timeline of the Reys’ escape from Paris.

Materials
• 8½ x 11 sheets of paper
• markers or crayons
• tape
• ruler

1. Ask students to retell the escape from Paris to Lisbon in their own words. If they need help, write the chapter titles from pages 44–62 on the board to remind them of the sequence of events.

2. Have students prepare to make a timeline by writing a list of dates with an event next to each date. As they review the story, remind them to look for phrases such as “the next day,” as well as for dates.

3. Tape sheets of paper together horizontally to make a timeline. Ask students to look at their lists of dates to decide whether their timeline should cover a year, a month, or a part of a month.

4. Have students sketch out a timeline beginning with June 10 and ending with June 24. After they write the events in the proper places on the timeline, they can choose which ones to illustrate.

For upper grades (Grades 5–7):
Students make parallel timeline and draw conclusions.

Materials
• 8½ x 11 sheets of paper
• markers or crayons
• tape
• ruler

1. Have students create two lists of events: one of the major events in the Reys’ lives and the other of world events that affected the Reys. Suggest that students use library resources to find these dates:
   • Start of World War I (1914)
   • End of World War I (1918)
   • Start of World War II (1939)
   • German troops enter Paris (1940)
   • End of World War II (1945)

2. Have students find the following dates in The Journey That Saved Curious George:
   • Hans Rey is eight years old; Margret Rey is born (1906)
   • Hans moves to Brazil (1924)
   • Margret and Hans marry (1935)
   • Reys flee Paris (1940)
   • Curious George published (1941)

3. Tape sheets of paper together horizontally to accommodate two timelines, one on top of the other. After students have made their timelines, have them write three questions that can be answered by comparing the two timelines. Students should exchange questions with a partner.

Map the Reys’ Travels
For lower grades (Grades 3–4):
Students make a map of the Reys’ escape.

Materials
• tracing paper
• markers or crayons
• map of western Europe

1. Have students trace a map showing France, the western half of Spain, and Portugal. Have them draw the Reys’ route of escape using The Journey That Saved Curious George. They can use the map at the front of the book for reference.

2. Students should put dates next to the names of places the Reys stopped.

For upper grades (Grades 5–7):
Map the Reys’ travels from Brazil in 1924 to New York in 1940.

Materials
• tracing paper
• markers or crayons
• world map

1. Have students use a world map to trace and correctly label countries in western Europe, Africa, and North and South America. Using the map at the back of the book as reference, students can draw the Reys’ journeys from Brazil to Paris and from Paris to New York.

2. Students should put dates next to key places.

Dig into Primary Sources
For lower grades (Grades 3–4):
Have students gather primary sources to be used in a book about themselves.

Materials
• primary sources from students’ lives
• paper
• pencils or pens

1. Page through The Journey That Saved Curious George and list the primary sources Borden used. How did they help her solve the mystery of what the Reys did and where they went?

2. Ask each student to imagine that he or she has been elected president and a biography is being written about him or her. Where could a writer find out about the student’s school years? Answers might include school records, interviews with teachers, and the student’s possessions.

3. Have students make a list of primary sources they own that an author could use. Examples include a yearbook, sports medals, homework assignments, and letters or cards to relatives.
4. Have students bring in several of their primary sources to share in small groups. Each group should make a list of the items and what they could learn from each. For example:
   • swimming medal—good in sports
   • yearbook—member of the chess club
   • homework assignment—did well in social studies
   • letters—has an aunt in Canada

5. Finally, tell students that it is truly possible that they might write their autobiography or someone else might write a book about them. Have students list the primary sources they would start collecting from now on to help a writer. Students should give reasons for each choice.

For upper grades (Grades 5–7):
Gather information from a diary and write a descriptive narrative.

Materials
   • paper
   • pencils or pens

1. Have students keep a diary for three days. They can pattern it on Hans Rey’s diary and record any of the following:
   • the weather
   • where they went, what they did, whom they saw
   • any purchases they made
   • what was happening in their community, the United States, or the world during that time

2. Have students exchange diaries with a partner. Before they read the diary, ask them to write down one question they hope to find an answer to in the diary.

3. Have students write a descriptive narrative based on what they can deduce from the diary. Narratives should describe their partner’s activities and include descriptive details. Pages 46–47 of *The Journey That Saved Curious George* are an example of how to turn information into a narrative.

About the Author
Louise Borden is curious about the world, curious about the who and why of history. Her book research takes her to where history has happened, whether it is England for the rescue mission to Dunkirk, Paris for the Reys’ great escape, or Boston for the Revolutionary War. Her books have been recognized by the Children’s Book of the Month Club, Junior Library Guild, National Council for the Social Studies, International Reading Association, Smithsonian’s Notable Books for Children, and Parent’s Choice Award.

About the Illustrator
Allan Drummond has created art for one of London’s busy tube stations and has illustrated many acclaimed children’s books. He worked as a journalist before studying graphic design and illustration in England. He writes for children when he is not illustrating other people’s books. In 2004, he became the chair of the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia.