

# Study Guide for



50

STATES IN  
STALLS

60

MINUTES  
MINUTES

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Dear Educator,

Thanks for booking your students to see 50 STATES IN 60 MINUTES. This show uses what appears to be a theatrical stunt to impart an informational overview of the history of the USA, going back to the earliest days of the planet to show how America has developed.

In the preface to the book *Eyewitness to History: 500 Years of American History in the Words of Those Who Saw It Happen*, editor David Colbert notes that there are three motivating factors that are common in the American story:

- **The pursuit of wealth**
- **The pursuit of individual freedom**
- **The need for speed**

Using those criteria as a guideline, it could be said that almost every segment of *50 States in 60 Minutes* revolves around one or another (or multiple combinations) of those motivations. The structure of the play builds from the pursuit of wealth (Columbus and the age of exploration) to the pursuit of individual freedom (the Separatists who left England and the colonists who fomented the Revolution) and the pursuit of speed as witnessed by the building of canals, railroad lines, and interstate highways designed to get goods and people where they're going faster than ever before, along with the new devices designed to assist in that movement.

The tone of the show is intentionally ridiculous – as if the history were being told by the creators of *Rocky and Bullwinkle*. We break from the goofiness every once in awhile to interrogate the storyline, giving your kids a chance to weigh in on the truth or falsity of what they've just heard, with the hope of getting them actively involved in looking for the interesting backstories behind their own country's history. As with most of GreatWorks shows, our approach is designed to challenge your students to play at the top of their intellectual games – there may be one or two jokes or references that your brightest kids get and some of their classmates won't, but those moments, if they occur, are teachable opportunities for all, and help us in our effort to put some fun spins on what most people assume is well-worn material.

While slavery, racism and sexism are touched on in the script, they're done with a very light hand – there's no question that your students will be aware of how they've impacted Americans over the course of the country's history, but we're hopeful that they'll be able to see them through the prism of time, and see how earlier prejudices were reversed with patience and courage on the part of the aggrieved and the evolving sense of inclusion and equality that's part of America's story to this day.

# The Age of Exploration and the Pursuit of Wealth

The opening segments of the show deal with a brief overview of world history and culture, leading quickly to the subject of trading between people in different parts of the world. Enter Christopher Columbus and his brother Fredo (\$1 to you if you nail all the *Godfather* references...), who get the idea from Chris' friend Marco Polo to go to China and get into the importing business. Polo, of course, was long-dead by the time Columbus came along - the "Columbus" character gets called on this anachronism during the course of the scene, which helps send the message to your students that they should be looking for elements in the show to call out 'true or false.'



In short order, Columbus' idea to seek a more expeditious trading route to Asia leads to his accidental discovery that there was a large landmass in between Spain and China. This, in turn, leads to a veritable traffic jam of boats from Europe seeking their own little outposts in the New World. Soon Portugese, Spanish, French, and English settlements dotted the land from the north-Atlantic down to South America.

## Some questions...

1. Would Columbus REALLY have believed the world was flat? As a sailor, why would he have known that it was round?
2. Research three products that came from the Americas that would have been new to Europeans in the 1500s.
3. Why did Columbus look at the natives he first encountered and call them Indians?

# Yearning to Breathe Free

With the mercantile interests in the New World well-established, another group of Europeans began to eye North America as a place not to make their fortune, but as a place where they could practice their religious beliefs free from local persecution. Chartering a ship, these separatists set out for America in September, 1620.

A couple of fun Pilgrim facts come out through this segment. For instance, did you know that the Pilgrims were actually supposed to be land in Virginia - not Massachusetts? Were you aware that the impetus to finally disembark from the Mayflower and start building a land settlement was spurred in part by a sudden shortage of a certain well-known malted barley beverage that we don't often think of Pilgrims as drinking (true fact - and we'll explain WHY!).



The Puritans were the first wave in Englanders setting up in the new land, each wave bringing with them their own old-world customs and superstitions, which led (indirectly) to the Salem witch trials 60 years after Plymouth was settled. But the tide of history turned quickly and the colonists were soon much more concerned with taxation issues than they were otherworldly spirits. The protests against English taxation without representation led to the formation of the first Continental Congress in 1774, and from there to a drive for independence from the mother country. Against hard odds, the Colonists finally put together a strategy for beating the English troops in their midst, culminating in the surrender at Yorktown in 1781.

## Some questions...

1. Do some research - was America the Pilgrims' first attempt at setting up their own colony?
2. Have you ever heard of other instances in America in which people allowed mass-hysteria to get the better of them and cause them to act dangerously toward others as the people in Salem did?
3. Were the English justified in trying to collect new taxes from the colonials?

# A "More Perfect Union"

With the end of the Revolution, the Americans needed to form a new type of government. The Articles of Confederation are covered (quickly), along with the new and improved government that comes from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 - the government that we still have today.

The "Great Compromise" is covered, with an active discussion of the principle behind the bicameral legislature and the way the argument laid seeds for a disagreement that would erupt with the Civil War 70 years later.

We cover the first ten amendments as part of this segment of the show, talking about why the Americans felt they were necessary, along with acting out short scenes to illustrate *what* they actually do.



## Some questions/discussion topics...

1. Name two principal problems with the original Articles of Confederation?
2. What was the government's response to the question of including slaves in the populations of the states? Does that seem like a reasonable solution to the question?
3. Can you remember at least 4 of the rights guaranteed by the first ten amendments?

## Go West Young Man (and woman)

Napoleon has a problem - he needs money to fight his wars. Jefferson has a need - access to the northwest corner of America. Put these two together, and you increase the size of the United States territory by 848,000 square miles overnight. Lewis and Clark head out to look for a river passage to the Pacific, and thousands of new settlers move to territories now known as Indiana, Michigan, Alabama, and Texas, among others.

And America, as they say, was ready to explode (in a good way - and some not-so-good ways...)

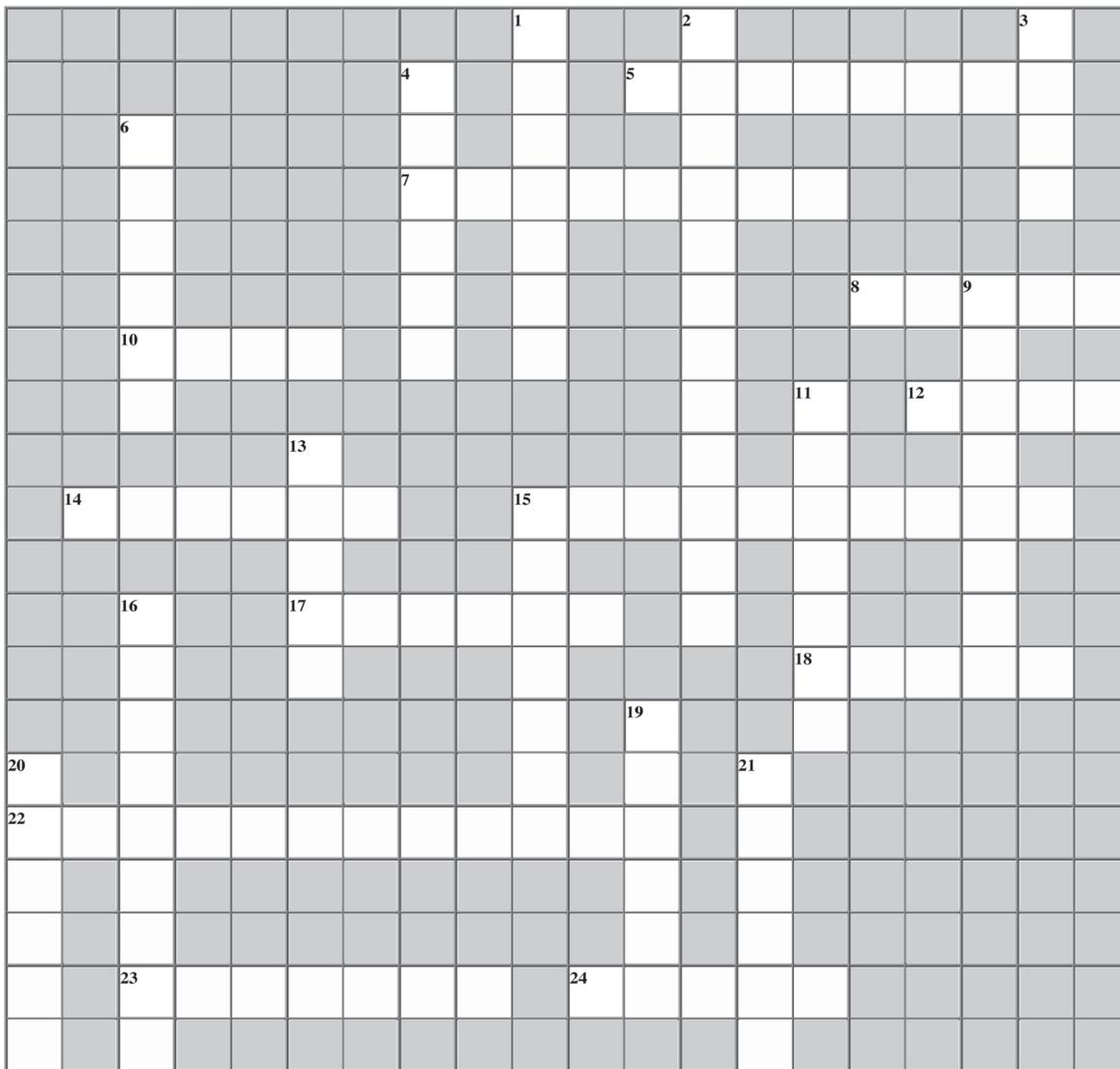
# And then we pick up speed....

From the point following Lewis and Clark's expedition, the show proceeds to cover 200 years of additional history in a fast and funny fashion. By the time it's done, your students will have been introduced to the following topics and personalities (among others):

- the War of 1812
- Dolly Madison & Francis Scott Key
- the Erie Canal
- the invention of the railroad
- the Missouri Compromise
- the California Goldrush - and the invention of Levis jeans
- the buildup to the Civil War
- the election of Lincoln
- the Civil War and the Gettysburg Address
- the transcontinental railroad
- further westward expansion
- the Spanish-American war
- Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, and Allexander Graham Bell
- the Wright Brothers and the airplane
- the birth of the movies
- World War I
- the roaring 20s
- Prohibition
- suffrage for women
- the Great Depression
- World War II
- the Baby Boom
- the Cold War
- the 60's, war, peace, and weird fashion
- the end of Jim Crow
- the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the internet age

In all of the above examples, you can see how they relate to at least one of three factors driving American progress, and there's no end to the amount of classroom discussion time that could be spent discussing which of the key motivators was most at play with each of these episodes.

# 50 States in 24 Questions....



## Down

1. Name of Pilgrims' native American friend
2. Another name for first 10 amendments to Constitution
3. Mr Gorbachev, tear down this \_\_\_\_
4. Last name of brothers who invented the airplane
6. Country who sold Jefferson the Louisiana Territory
9. New state that caused problems in 1820s
11. President who delivered the Gettysburg Address
13. Give me liberty, or give me \_\_\_\_
15. What the people of Salem thought they had
16. Name of ship that carried the Pilgrims
19. The landmass from before continents formed
20. Inventor of the light bulb
21. Food at First Thanksgiving

## Across

5. Washington's home state
7. Spanish queen who gave Columbus boats
8. Americans who couldn't vote until 1920s
10. Scene of shortest US war
12. Where Columbus thought he was going
14. Artform developed in California in early 20th century
15. First US President
17. Fruit that Columbus brought back to Europe
18. Clark's exploring partner
22. First Lady who saved portrait of Washington from fire
23. Where the Pilgrims were from
24. What the English tried collecting from Colonists