

..... A TEACHER'S GUIDE .....



# THE EXPLORERS

A New  
History of  
America  
in Ten  
Expeditions

Amanda Bellows

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*The Explorers* rediscovers a diverse group of Americans who went to the western frontier and beyond, traversing the farthest reaches of the globe and even penetrating outer space in their endeavor to find the unknown. Many escaped from lives circumscribed by racism, sexism, poverty, and discrimination as they took on great risk in unfamiliar territory. Across two centuries and many thousands of miles of terrain, Amanda Bellows offers an ode to our country's most intrepid adventurers – and reveals the history of America in the process.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda Bellows is a historian of the United States and teaches at Lang College - The New School in New York City. She is also an Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer. Bellows received her Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### PART ONE

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#### Prologue

- Why do Americans think of Daniel Boone as one of the most famous American explorers?
- What kinds of people have been left out of histories of American exploration and why?

#### Chapter 1. Sacagawea: The Navigator

- Where was Sacagawea born and how did she end up in present-day North Dakota when she first met Corps of Discovery in 1804?
- In what ways did Sacagawea contribute to the success of the Corps of Discovery's journey to the Pacific Ocean?
- How did Sacagawea's Shoshone identity and upbringing help her serve as a geographic and cultural navigator?

#### Chapter 2. James Beckwourth: The Mountain Man

- James Beckwourth was born into slavery in Virginia and grew up in St. Louis, Missouri during the early nineteenth century. Why did Beckwourth want to travel to the western frontier and what did he want to leave behind?
- Why did James Beckwourth live in so many different regions of the United States over the course of his lifetime?
- What was James Beckwourth's most important discovery, and why?

### Chapter 3. Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Homesteader

- To what region of the United States did Laura Ingalls Wilder move in 1879? What happened to the Native Americans who had lived there before she arrived?
- What were the central challenges for Laura and her family while they lived in Dakota Territory? Did other homesteaders experience similar hardships?
- Do you consider Laura Ingalls Wilder, or female homesteaders like her, to be explorers? Why or why not?

### Chapter 4. John Muir: The Preservationist

- Did John Muir's experience as a Scottish immigrant give him a unique perspective of the American wilderness? Why or why not?
- John Muir's central objective was to conserve land. How might this goal have differed from that of earlier explorers?
- Was John Muir successful in changing the way that Americans perceived the wilderness in the late nineteenth century?

### Chapter 5. Florence Bailey: The Conservationist

- Why were bird populations dramatically decreasing in Gilded Age America?
- What were Florence Bailey's goals as an ornithologist and an explorer?
- How did Florence Bailey's discoveries, authorship, and political activism shape the way Americans viewed bird populations?

## PART TWO

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### Chapter 6. William Sheppard: The Missionary

- Why did William Sheppard want to travel to the Belgian Congo at the turn of the twentieth century?
- What did William Sheppard discover during his journeys throughout the Belgian Congo? Which discovery was the most shocking, and why?
- William Sheppard began his career as a missionary and became a human rights activist as well. How did his findings generate international outrage against King Leopold II and help the Congolese people?

### Chapter 7. Harriet Chalmers Adams: The Geographer

- Why did Harriet Chalmers Adams want to explore South America in 1904? What were her objectives?
- Harriet Chalmers Adams met many different Indigenous people throughout South America during her travels. What does she learn from them and how did they inspire her?
- How did Harriet Chalmers Adams's career open doors for women in the fields of exploration and geography?

### Chapter 8. Matthew Henson: The Arctic Explorer

- Matthew Henson faced a tremendous amount of discrimination during the Jim Crow era, when he began exploring the Arctic with Robert Peary. How did he respond to racism while pursuing his exploratory goals?
- What skills did Matthew Henson learn from the Inuit people of the Arctic?
- Why did Matthew Henson call the discovery of the North Pole "almost the last of the world's great *work*?"

## Chapter 9. Amelia Earhart: The Navigator

- How did the advent of World War I expose Amelia Earhart to the field of aviation?
- Why did Amelia Earhart want to become a pilot? Did air represent a new frontier in the 1920s and 1930s?
- What were Amelia Earhart's objectives as an explorer, and what traits did she possess that helped her achieve her goals?

## Chapter 10. Sally Ride: The Astronaut

- Which World War II-era invention led to the opening of space as a new frontier?
- Why didn't NASA allow women to train as astronauts during the 1950s and 1960s?
- What did Sally Ride want to achieve during her 1983 journey into space on the Challenger as the first American female astronaut?

## Epilogue

- What are the remaining frontiers of exploration? What do today's explorers want to achieve?
- Will the invention of new technologies help future adventurers attain their wide-ranging goals?

## WRITING PROMPTS

- *The Explorers* reveals that American men and women from diverse backgrounds made important discoveries that shaped our nation's history. How did they defy gender conventions or challenge racism as they pursued their different goals?
- What were the objectives of American explorers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How and why did their goals of discovery change over time?
- What role did technology play in fueling exploration? Which advancements in transportation and communication made it possible for explorers to reach new frontiers on land, in air, and in outer space over the last two hundred years?
- What were the primary causes and consequences of U.S. westward expansion between 1776 and 1890? Describe the experience of western exploration, migration, and settlement for diverse groups of Americans including surveyors, traders, and homesteaders. Explain how U.S. expansion affected Indigenous people in different regions of the United States.

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