

---

# MY AMERICA: A POETRY ATLAS OF THE UNITED STATES

Selected by: Lee Bennett Hopkins

Illustrator: Stephen Alcorn

Publisher: Simon & Schuster

## THEME:

From “sea to shining sea,” the United States of America offers a tremendous diversity of people, geography, and history.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

This geographical poetry collection includes poets’ descriptions of every region of the United States. LeVar and a troupe of youngsters, who share their part of the USA, bring a map of the United States to life as this adventure explores America’s beauty and diversity. We visit Erica, age 12 who lives on the family ranch in Montana, and ten year-old Stephen who lives in New York City – showing how being a kid in America is as varied as the 50 states that form this country.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Ask students what they like about the state they live in.

Read the poems in *My America* that represent your home state and/or geographical region, and discuss with students why the topics of the poems are appropriate or meaningful to your area.

No matter *where* children live, they have many aspects of their lives in common. Discuss some of these shared experiences with students.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Watch again the episode segments featuring the girl from rural Montana and the boy from New York City. As a class, complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the lives of the two children.

Children in the video program did “commercials” for their states. Have students write a similar advertisement, highlighting important facts, landmarks, geographic features, and so on about their home state. (An alternative would be a commercial about the state they researched for the two activities above.) Provide opportunities for them to rehearse an oral presentation of their ads then videotape the performances.

After students have completed research about the states, have an U.S.A. party. Work with the music teacher and learn songs about the United States. Send out a request for old travel brochures and magazines that may be cut apart. Have students make collages about the states on construction paper. Laminate the collages and use them for placemats. Enlist the help of parents to prepare snacks that represent different states, e.g., maple sugar candy, popcorn, Kool Aid, apples, peanut butter, etc. Play games created by students from their research facts. Possibilities include:

- a variation on “20 Questions,” in which one student has a state in mind and the class asks 5 questions that can be answered only by “yes” or “no.” For example, “Is the state in New England?” “Is the state by the ocean?” “Are there mountains in the state?”
- a type of “Jeopardy” game, in which categories have been identified (e.g., “State Capitals,” “State Nicknames,” “Famous Landmarks,” “Famous People,” etc.) “Answers” are listed for each category, and students play in teams by identifying a state in the form of a question.
- “Name That State” where teams of students play for points by trying to guess the state based on clues that are revealed one at a time. The first clue, the most difficult, is worth 4 points; the second clue is worth 3 points, etc.; the team gets only one point if it needs all four clues to guess the state. Example: “Lincoln,” “moon-bow,” “horses,” “Mammoth Cave.”
- students writing chants based on the familiar rhyme, “A, my name is Alice,” and perform them at the party while the rest of the class snaps their fingers to the rhythm. Examples: “W, my name is Willie, I come from Washington, my capital is Olympia, and I grow apples.” “M, my name is Maddie, I come from Massachusetts, my capital is Boston, and I had the first library.”

Collect books that contain facts about the 50 states, and enlist the help of the library media specialist for further resources. Have students select a state and research geographical features, climate, important sites to see, and popular vacation spots. Have them use the information they collect and create a travel poster that would entice people to want to visit the state.

Using the resources from the activity above, have students plan a five-day vacation trip for their family to the state they research. They will need to decide what time of year they wish to take the trip, the first place they will visit, how long they will stay at each place, and their route around the state. Provide each student with a blank outline map of the state for marking the route. These trip plans may be displayed with the travel posters from the above activity or bound together into a book entitled, “Travel the U.S.A. with Room \_\_\_\_\_.”

## READING RAINBOW TEACHER’S GUIDE

Program #140 — My America: A Poetry Atlas Of The United States



Proudly sponsored by:

---

As a class, write a list poem about your home state. Begin by brainstorming a list of words that are significant to your state for a variety of reasons. For example, Colorado: mountain peaks, skiing, mile-high city, the "Unsinkable Molly Brown," Continental Divide, blue skies, aspen (tree), cliff dwellings, Denver mint, Pike's Peak, silver, bighorn sheep, spruce, columbine (flower), Denver, high plains, gorges, snow, Broncos, red rocks, etc. Rearrange words on the list and/or add words to make phrases as needed. End the poem by repeating the name of the state. Invite students to select one or two lines from the list poem and create their own poem. Collect the poems into an anthology about your state.

Provide outline maps of the United States for students to take home. Have them work with their families and color all the states they have visited in one color, and states in which they have lived another color. Using yet a different color, identify states where relatives live. (They might need to problem solve how to mark states that require more than one color.) Indicate that they will need to make a key to the colors on their map.

#### **RELATED THEMES:**

communities  
maps and map-making  
modes of transportation  
U.S. history  
symbols and famous landmarks of America

#### **RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #29 - Watch the Stars Come Out  
Program #124 - Someplace Else

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Lee Bennett Hopkins is one of the most celebrated poets and poetry anthologists in the field of children's literature. He has received numerous awards and prizes for his work and established the Lee Bennett Hopkins/International Reading Association Promising Poet Award. Hopkins compiled the collection *Marvelous Math*, a **Reading Rainbow** review book. He lives in Westchester County and Greenwich Village, New York.

#### **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

Stephen Alcorn is a painter and printmaker whose work is exhibited in collections all over the world. Before *My America*, he illustrated two other award-winning poetry anthologies for young readers. He and his wife, a botanical artist, and their two children live in Cambridge, New York.

#### **BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

CELEBRATE THE FIFTY STATES  
by Loreen Leedy (Holiday House)

THE SCRAMBLED STATES OF AMERICA  
by Laurie Keller (Henry Holt)

TULIP SEES AMERICA  
by Cynthia Rylant, illus. by Lisa Desimini (Scholastic)

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL  
by Katherine Lee Bates, illus. by Neil Waldman (Atheneum)

SCHOLASTIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE UNITED STATES  
by Judy Bock & Rachel Kranz (Scholastic)

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA  
selected by Amy L. Cohn (Scholastic)

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND  
by Woody Guthrie, illus. by Kathy Jakobsen (Little, Brown)

WISH YOU WERE HERE: EMILY'S GUIDE TO THE 50 STATES  
by Kathleen Krull, illus. by Amy Schwartz (Bantam)

HOME  
by Thomas Locker (Harcourt)

ACROSS AMERICA: I LOVE YOU  
by Christine Loomis, illus. by Kate Kiesler (Hyperion)

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: A STATE-BY-STATE GUIDE  
by Millie Miller & Cyndi Nelson (Scholastic)

CELEBRATE AMERICA: IN POETRY AND ART  
edited by Nora Panzer, illus. with art from the National Museum of American Art (Hyperion)

THE FLAG WE LOVE  
by Pam Muñoz Ryan, illus. by Ralph Masiello (Scholastic)

UNCLE SAM AND OLD GLORY: SYMBOLS OF AMERICA  
by Delno C. West & Jean M. West, illus. by Christopher Manson (Atheneum)

STRINGBEAN'S TRIP TO THE SHINING SEA  
by Vera B. Williams & Jennifer Williams (Greenwillow)

#### **READING RAINBOW TEACHER'S GUIDE**

Program #140— My America: A Poetry Atlas Of The United States



Proudly sponsored by: