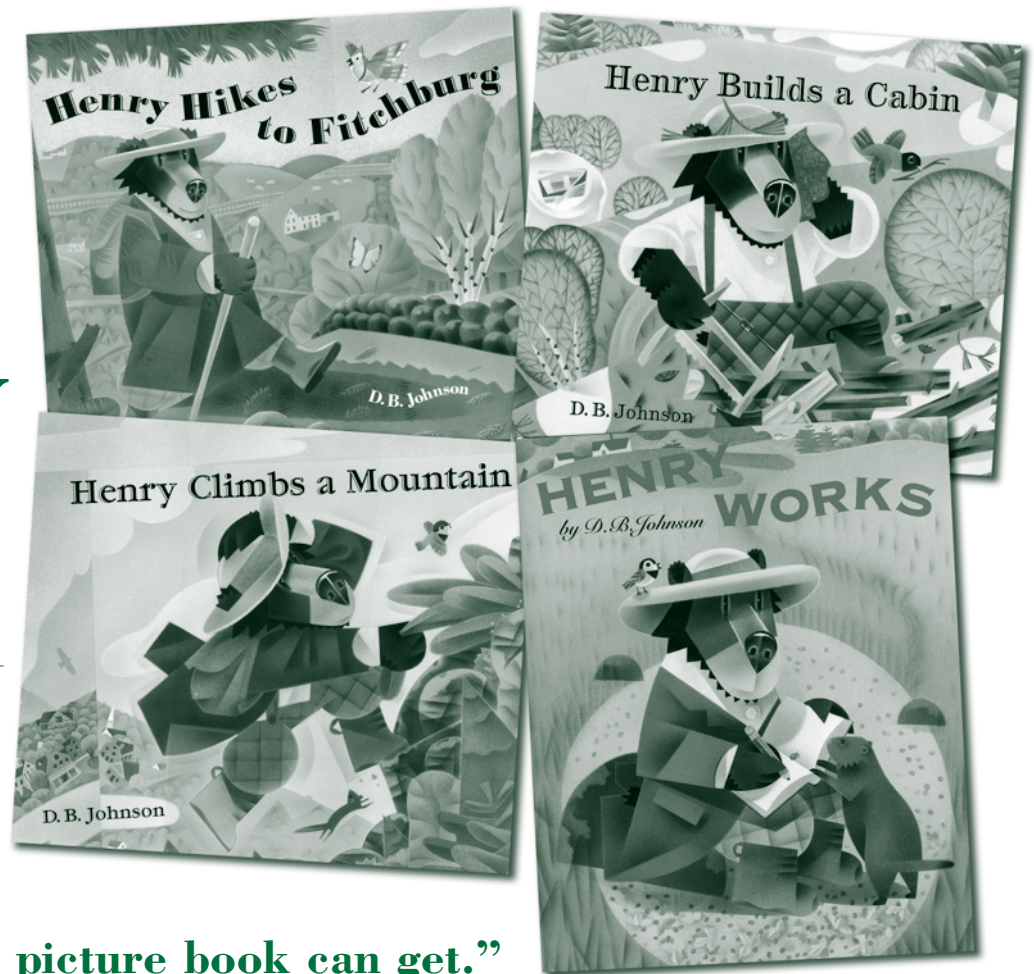


# The Henry Books

by D. B. Johnson



**“This is as good as a picture book can get.”**

—Daniel Pinkwater, *Weekend Edition Saturday*

**Henry Hikes to Fitchburg (2000)**  
0-395-96867-4 • \$15.00

- *New York Times* bestseller
- Winner of the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award
- A NY Times Best Illustrated Children's Book
- PW Best Book of the Year
- SLJ Best Book of the Year
- Booklist Editor's Choice
- PW Flying Start

**Henry Builds a Cabin (2002)**  
0-618-13201-5 • \$15.00

- *New York Times* bestseller
- ABC Choices Award Book
- PW Best Book of the Year
- Booklist Editor's Choice

**Henry Climbs a Mountain (2003)**  
0-618-26902-9 • \$15.00

- *New York Times* bestseller

**Henry Works (2004)**  
0-618-42003-7 • \$15.00

## Introduction

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundation under them.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Young students are forever building castles in the air. Each dream, piece of writing, drawing, and experiment expresses not only what they have seen and experienced, but also what they imagine. Children mix the real with the imagined in equal parts. As their teacher, you both encourage their imaginations and help them put those necessary foundations in place. Who better to introduce them to a great American dreamer, philosopher, historical figure, and writer than you? And when better to make that introduction than when the children are young and open?

D. B. Johnson introduces single bits of Henry David Thoreau's philosophy and biography in each of his four picture books about Henry the bear and his friends. With these books and the ideas in this learning guide, you and your students can explore Thoreau's vision in your own classroom.



## In the Classroom

### Henry Hikes to Fitchburg

Thoreau would maintain that *going* to Fitchburg was more important than *getting* to Fitchburg. He wrote: "Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of each." He believed that we should take advantage of every opportunity, every moment, and that we should enjoy our journeys, not just our destinations.

Along the way on Henry's walk to Fitchburg, he hopped a river, carved a stick, pressed flowers, climbed a tree, paddled on the river, found a bird's nest, ate some honey, went for a swim, and ate his way through a blackberry patch. His friend, on the other hand, got to Fitchburg by working all day to earn the fare for the train. Though they both reached the destination at about the same time, who do your students think had the more enjoyable day?

Henry stops to pull ferns and flowers and presses them in a book. Collect flowers with your class, then press them for cards or pictures.

#### Materials needed

Flowers, ferns, and leaves  
 Old phone book  
 Bricks or heavy books  
 Paper towels  
 Card stock paper or oak tag  
 Glue stick  
 Tweezers  
 Plastic wrap

#### Procedure

Collect flowers that have small flat blooms, such as impatiens, pansies, or buttercups (include their stem and leaves). Pick small delicate leaves such as ferns and clover. It is best not to collect your flowers and leaves in the morning because they will be covered with dew and take longer to dry out.

Place the flower and leaf collection on two sheets of paper towels, cover with two more sheets, and place between the pages of the phone book.

Set the phone book aside in a cool place and weigh it down with bricks or other heavy books.

After about a week, replace the paper towels and re-press the flowers. Let another week pass. If the flowers are not dry, replace the paper towels again. When the flowers are completely dry, you and your students will be ready to make cards and flower pictures.

Using the tweezers, carefully arrange the flowers, ferns, and leaves on the oak tag. When you're satisfied with the placement, remove the flowers one at a time and dab the back of the flowers with the glue stick. Place the flowers back on the card. When all of the flowers have been glued in place, cover the picture with a piece of plastic wrap cut larger than the oak tag. Wrap the extra plastic around the picture to protect it. Place some of the heavy books onto the picture and wait about thirty minutes for the glue to dry completely.

Make a display of the class's work.

Thoreau hiked thirty miles through the countryside to Fitchburg. What would your students encounter on a thirty-mile hike from your school? Using a road map and a compass, place your school in the center and measure out a circle with a diameter of thirty miles. What are some destinations that are about thirty miles away? Pick one and plan out a route to get there. What towns will your students pass through? What natural areas will they cross? What points of interest will they encounter?

## Henry Builds a Cabin

Henry David Thoreau advised us all to "simplify, simplify." He wrote: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind." He lived his life according to this philosophy, and nowhere is this more clear than in the cabin he built.

Thoreau wanted a quiet place to live where he could enjoy and keep a journal about the wildlife and the outdoors. He built a simple cabin with just enough room for him to be comfortable. What kind of house would your students build? Would it have all the modern conveniences or just the bare necessities? Would it be bigger than their neighbor's house or just big enough to suit their needs? Would they want to stay inside most of the day or spend most of their time outdoors? Discuss what defines a house with your students and why Thoreau built his modest cabin. Then have your students design a house that is just right

for them. When they finish, have them present and explain their designs to the class and discuss how Thoreau would react to their houses.

What was it like for Thoreau to live in a one-room house? Move the classroom furniture to the sides of the room. Measure a ten-by-fifteen-foot space and mark the floor with masking tape to replicate the size of Thoreau's cabin. Using newspaper and tape, indicate where a table, a writing desk, three chairs, and Thoreau's bed would go, as this is what filled his house. Have your students discuss the following questions: How many friends could Thoreau entertain? Did he spend a lot of time inside? What seems to be missing from his house?

Thoreau built his cabin on the banks of Walden Pond in 1845 for \$28.12. Could a house be built for the same price now? What could \$28.12 buy today? With your students, put a list together of some of the materials needed to build a house, then go to your local building supply store and figure a cost estimate. From the list, have your students calculate what they could purchase for \$28.12.

Integrate the Henry books into your math curriculum. Some problems to solve:

- Thoreau's house was ten by fifteen feet. If he started at one end and walked around the outside of the house, how far would he have walked?
- If the floorboards for Thoreau's house were each six inches wide and ten feet long, how many boards would he need to cover the floor? How many boards would he need if they were twelve inches wide?

## Henry Climbs a Mountain

Thoreau held strong beliefs about freedom and justice. He did not believe in obeying authority for its own sake. He wrote: "Any fool can make a rule, and any fool will mind it." When he broke a rule he did not feel was right, he was prepared for the consequences. "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is in prison."

Being in the outdoors meant freedom to Henry, so in *Henry Climbs a Mountain*, when he was put in jail for not paying his taxes, he remembered his experiences and used his imagination to invoke the freedom taken from him. He took out his crayons, and on the wall he drew a hummingbird, a tree, and a path that crossed a river. Before he knew it his shoes were wet. He drew a mountain and climbed it, singing, "The bear goes over the mountain." The more he remembered, the more he imagined and the more he drew. Soon the whole outside world was with him in his cell.

Have your students create a mural of meaningful things from nature. Cover a wall with drawing paper and allow them to draw one of their own outdoor experiences.

Discussion with older classes:

Henry's drawing was an expression of freedom. In it he met a traveler on the mountain. Who is the traveler? What clues does the author give you? What did the traveler mean when he said he was walking "As far as the star in the North?" Why would Henry give the stranger his shoes? Why do you sup-



pose the traveler didn't spend the night in town? Henry and the traveler laughed and sang more songs. One of the songs may well have been "Follow the Drinking Gourd." You can find the lyrics to the song, along with an explanation of the text, at the NASA Quest Educational Web site:

<http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/lc/special/mlk/gourd2.html>

When Henry gets out of jail, Sam asks him, "How does it feel to be free?" He responds, "It feels like being on top of a very tall mountain." Discuss this expression as a simile, and the title, *Henry Climbs a Mountain*, as a metaphor.

## Henry Works

Thoreau was a writer who gathered his ideas and inspiration from the world around him. His friend Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "The length of [Henry's] walk uniformly made the length of his writing. If shut up in the house, he did not write at all."

Henry's walk to work is inseparable from his work itself. As he walks, he takes in all of nature around him. When he gets back home, he has everything he needs to do his job: to write.

Henry keeps a journal of what he sees and what he feels. Your students can do the same. With your students' journals in hand, take a trip to your local nature preserve. Walk the paths. Sit and think. Take in the sights, noises, and smells. Experience what nature has to offer. Then, the children should go to work, just like Henry, and write about the nature they see and the thoughts that come into their minds.

Put their writings together into a class journal titled "Thoughts on a Nature Walk."

On Henry's walk to work, he helped his neighbors: Mrs. Hosmer, the postmaster, Emerson, Mrs. Alcott, and Mrs. Hawthorne. He also put a crossing stone in place in the river and watered the milkweed in the field. Your students can do things for their neighbors and community, as well. Organize the cleanup of a local park; visit a senior citizen center and help out; plant a flower or vegetable garden on the school grounds; participate in a walkathon or readathon in support of a community cause. Brainstorm other possibilities with your class.

## The Henry Books

To genuinely appreciate D. B. Johnson's words and pictures, have your children spend more time with the Henry books looking for details. Ask the students to keep a list of discoveries they make while examining the books slowly and deliberately. What surprises do they find? What new insights do they gain?

For example:

- How does D. B. Johnson identify the traveler Henry meets in *Henry Climbs a Mountain*?
- How does the author tell us or show us how Henry's friend feels about the jobs he takes in order to earn train fare for his trip to Fitchburg?
- What might we guess about the clothes in Henry's closet by noticing what he wears in the four books? How does that increase our understanding of his values?

Create a class list of the details your students find. How does the list change their understanding of Thoreau? How does it deepen their appreciation of the Henry books?

## About the Author

D. B. Johnson grew up in rural New Hampshire and spent many hours playing in the woods on quiet, rainy days. Even before reading Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, he knew that living close to nature was the way to keep his life simple. It helped him remember what was truly important, which is why he still begins each day with a walk in the woods. He lives in Lebanon, New Hampshire, with his wife.

## Teacher Resources for Henry David Thoreau

The Walden Cabin Project

<http://www.bensonwood.com/news/walden/index.html>

*What Thoreau Knew: Walden and the Meaning of Voluntary Simplicity* by John Shepler

<http://www.johnshepler.com/articles/thoreau.html>

*The Thoreau Reader: The Works of Henry David Thoreau*

<http://eserver.org/thoreau>

The Walden Woods Project

<http://www.walden.org>



*This guide was created by Clifford Wohl, educational consultant*