

Teaching suggestions: The North Carolina Gazette and Poor Richard's Almanack

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

These teaching suggestions will help your students comprehend and discuss the pages “North Carolina’s First Newspaper¹” and “Poor Richard’s Almanack²” from the North Carolina digital history textbook. The first of these is an article about the *North Carolina Gazette*, and the second is a series of 18th-century excerpts from *Poor Richard’s Almanack*.

The suggested activities encourage students to think critically about the reading passages and develop an understanding about how information was disseminated during the colonial era.

- **Class preview discussion.** Before reading the passages, facilitate a class discussion addressing the following questions:
 - **How do we get news today?**
Most students will mention television, internet, and radio. Some may mention newspapers.
 - **How quickly did we get news today?**
Students will be very aware that news is nearly instantaneous in the world today.
 - **How did people in colonial days get their news?**
Students may mention newspapers, broadsides, letters, or word of mouth.
 - **How quickly did news travel in the colonial period?**
Most students will know that news traveled quite slowly.
 - **Why is it important to know that news traveled slowly at that time?**
Answers will vary. Students should understand that it could take weeks or even months for news to travel between colonies or from Europe.
 - **Why might colonists have wanted newspapers and other forms of news?**
Answers will vary. Students should understand that, unlike today, people were not as connected to the areas outside their immediate vicinity. Newspapers, almanacs, broadsides, and other published material enabled colonists to have some connection with the outside world.

- **Colonial newspaper.** Have students write their own newspaper for colonial times in their area of North Carolina using the information from “North Carolina’s First Newspaper³” for examples. This works best if students are given a legal-size piece of paper, which they can fold and then create a four-page paper that isn’t too daunting. Students should include some historical information, editorials, advertisements, announcements, and a personals section. Another option would be to allow students to use a desktop publishing program to complete their papers. Students could work individually as a project or homework assignment, or in groups in the classroom.
- **Colonial almanac.** Have students invent their own almanac for their region of North Carolina. For this activity, you could have students do just one two-page spread that would cover one month. They could include weather by looking at the Old Farmer’s Almanac website⁴, which provides a free two-month long-range forecast that they could include in their almanac. The website also provides moon and sun information.
- **Old Farmer’s Almanac.** Have students spend some time exploring the Old Farmer’s Almanac website⁵. Note that the site does have some pop-ups, but it will give students an idea about what kind of items were in almanacs — and still are today. Students can enter their own town to find out sun and moon times, weather, etc. A link to the “Old Farmer’s Almanac for Kids” may also be interesting for students. While much of it is for upper elementary students, some portions are appropriate for middle-school students.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4260>.
2. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4211>.
3. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4260>.
4. See <http://www.almanac.com/>.
5. See <http://www.almanac.com/>.

About the author

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