

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

JEANNETTE RANKIN: POLITICAL PIONEER

by Gretchen Woelfle

- 2008 Once Upon A World Award Simon Wiesenthal Center/Museum of Tolerance
- 2008 Children's Lit Council of So. California Award
- 2008 Finalist: The WILLA Literary Award
- 2008 *Skipping Stones* Honor Award
- Montana Selection: 2007 National Book Festival
- *Booklist* Top Ten Youth Biographies
- *Instructor* Teachers' picks: 4 Best Biographies
- NCSS/CBC 2008 Notable Social Studies Trade Book
- Amelia Bloomer Project List of Notable Books



Boyd's Mills/Calkins Creek 2007

AMERICAN HISTORY – Research, write, discuss

1. **Women in politics** – When did the voters in your state first elect a woman to the state legislature, to Congress? Search state historical society websites and others: www.womenincongress.house.gov; www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Women_in_Congress. “Jeannette Rankin FBI” or go to foia.fbi.gov/ <http://vault.fbi.gov/jeannette-rankin/jeannette-rankin-part-01-of-01/view>. NB: These files may no longer be able to be downloaded from the website. If that is so, email me at the above address and I will forward them to you.

- What do these documents tell us about government concerns during the 1950s-1970s?
- Why did they consider Rankin a threat? Do you agree?
- Why are some parts of the report blacked out?

2. **Read Jeannette Rankin's FBI file** on the internet. Search for “Jeannette Rankin FBI” or go to <http://vault.fbi.gov/jeannette-rankin/jeannette-rankin-part-01-of-01/view>. These reports were kept secret until the passage of the Freedom of Information Act.

- What do these documents tell us about government concerns during the 1950s-1970s?
- Why did they consider Rankin a threat? Do you agree?
- Why are some parts of the report blacked out?
- Research the history of the Freedom of Information Act.

3. **Vietnam War** – Interview older people about the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s.

- Did their opinions change over time?
- Did they take part in war protests?
- Did they know any draft resisters who refused to serve in the armed forces?
- Compare your interviews with other students in the class.

4. **Eleanor Roosevelt** is mentioned on pp. 33 and 67 in the Rankin biography.

- Find out more about her. How was she a “political pioneer” like Jeannette Rankin?
- Write or act out an imaginary meeting between ER and JR, discussing peace, women in politics, and men in politics!

See <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers> (The ER Papers Project) for a children's bibliography.

5. Rankin admired **Mahatma Gandhi** and his policy of nonviolence (p. 81.)

- Find out more about Gandhi. Many children's biographies at all reading levels are available.
- Write or act out a conversation between Rankin and Gandhi. See <http://www.mkgandhi.org> for students' projects.

6. Research **Fiorello LaGuardia**. See Wikipedia; also www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org

- What was his ethnic background? How did that influence him as a politician?
- What interests did he share with JR? How were they different?
- Would he have made a good husband for JR?

GEOGRAPHY – Map activities

- 1. A RANKIN FAMILY MAP** – Map of North America; three colored markers
 - **Trace Jeannette’s father’s journey** from Ontario, Canada to Missoula, Montana. (p. 16)
 - In another color **trace Jeannette’s mother’s journey** from New Hampshire to Montana. (p. 16)
 - Give **Jeannette** her own color and trace her first journeys from Montana to Boston, New York City, Washington, DC, and San Francisco.
 - Mark the different **places Jeannette lived**: Missoula, Montana; New York City; Washington, DC; Watkinsville, Georgia; and finally Carmel, California.
- 2. JEANNETTE’S MONTANA SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN** – Map of Montana, string, pins
 1. Study a map of Montana. JR traveled six thousand miles in her state during the 1914 women’s suffrage campaign. Where do you think she might have traveled?
 2. Using the map’s scale of miles measure and cut a piece of string to represent 6000 miles.
 3. Attach pins to the map of likely places she visited, wrap the string around the pin, and keep stretching the string along the roads she might had traveled, until all the string is used up.
- 3. MAP OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE** – U.S. map and colored markers
 1. Look for **“U.S. women’s suffrage timeline”** online or in an encyclopedia. Students will read through more suffrage history to find the dates and states.
 2. **Color the states** that gave women the right to vote before the 19th Constitutional Amendment was passed in 1920. Mark the dates women got the vote on the map.
 3. **Make a chronological list** of these women’s suffrage states. Where is Montana on the list?

CONTEMPORARY POLITICS – Research, discuss, write, take a poll

1. Today women have the vote, but **most of our elected politicians are men.**
 1. **Research** your city council; your state legislature, and the U.S. Congress.
 2. **What %** of elected representatives are female?
 3. **Why do you think so few politicians are female?**
2. **Write a report about a female lawmaker in your state.**
 1. Find out about her **early life**. Did she have a hard time breaking into politics?
 2. Read her website. **What issues** is she most interested in?
 3. **Write her a letter** and tell her what you think about these issues.
3. **Take a poll** in your class and perhaps in other classes asking questions like the following:
 - Do you think women can do as good a job as men as mayor of your town?
 - As the governor of your state?
 - Would you vote for a women president?
 - Would you vote for a girl class president?
 - Women make up about 50% of the population. Should we pass a law declaring that 50% of the members of Congress must be female?
 - Add your own questions.
 - Create a graph to show how people voted in your poll.
4. **Jeannette Rankin worked for peace.** She believed that we should keep an army to protect our own country, but we should not send our soldiers to fight in other countries. **What do you think?**

LITERARY AND DRAMATIC ACTIVITIES – Write, draw, act, sing, party

1. Choose an event from Jeannette Rankin’s life, such as the baby and the Indians (p 18,) the wounded horse (p 14,) the deaf boy (p 25,) the Sunshine Club (p 64,) etc. **Write a short story** with invented characters and dialogue. Be sure to add conflict to your story.
2. Form small groups and **act out scenes** from Jeannette’s life – real and invented: picnic at her father’s sawmill (pp 19-20,) speaking for suffrage on a street corner (pp 28-9,) speaking for peace in Vietnam (pp 84-87) or any other scene that might have happened.
3. **Research the music** sung by the protest movements in the 1960s. Look for recordings and learn the songs yourself. Search for “1960s protest songs”: http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-protest-songs-from-the-1960s.php#/_term includes YouTube videos. <http://www.brownielocks.com/sixtieswarsongs.html>: sing along with synthesizer and lyrics.
4. **Throw a party** – a women’s suffrage luncheon (pp 32-3, 37, 38) or a 1960s peace demonstration (pp 85-89.) Make posters and cartoons, dress in period costume, plan a menu, sing songs.