

# Daniel Boone Short Guide

## Daniel Boone by James Daugherty

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## Overview

In *Daniel Boone*, Daugherty weaves the most interesting experiences of Boone's life into a fast-paced narrative, creating an exciting account of his greatest adventures. Daugherty also points out that, despite his extraordinary life, Boone was in many ways a typical American frontiersman. Because the biography includes a good deal of information on the setting in which Boone lived, readers can better understand his motivations and his achievements become more realistic.

## About the Author

James Henry Daugherty was born June 1, 1889, in Asheville, North Carolina, to Charles M. and Susan Peyton Telfair Daugherty. He spent his early childhood on an Indiana farm and in a small southern Ohio town.

When Daugherty was about nine, the family moved to Washington, D.C., where his father took a government job.

In addition to his public schooling in Washington, Daugherty attended the Philadelphia Art Academy for one year and studied in London during his father's two-year assignment there as an agent for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As important as his formal education were the lessons in storytelling Daugherty learned from his parents and his grandfather. From his mother, a native of Virginia, he heard songs and stories of the pre-Civil War South. From his father, a graduate of the University of Michigan, he heard the best of English and American literature, from Chaucer to Mark Twain. Daugherty's grandfather was probably the most significant influence upon his later career, though.

Daugherty relished his grandfather's tall tales of Daniel Boone and the frontier, which had been handed down for several generations.

During World War I, Daugherty camouflaged ships and designed war posters for the U.S. Navy. He also worked on murals and illustrations for books and magazines. Shortly after the war, he became an illustrator for the Doubleday Page Company, and as his reputation grew, he worked for a number of book publishers, as well as for magazines such as the *New Yorker*, *Forum*, and *Golden Book*. During the 1920s he also painted murals in movie theaters belonging to the Loew chain.

Later, as a part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, he painted murals in public buildings, including a high school in Stamford, Connecticut. His biographical novel *Daniel Boone*, which he both authored and illustrated, won the 1939 Newbery Medal. In 1971 a retrospective exhibit of his work was held in New York.

Daugherty's wife, Sonia Medvedeva, was also a well-known author of books for children and young adults. Their son, Charles Michael (Chris), continued the family tradition, writing young adult books that his father illustrated. In the 1920s the family moved to Westport, Connecticut, where Daugherty lived until his death on February 21, 1974.

## Setting

Daniel Boone opens in the 1740s, when Boone is a young boy living with his family in Berks County, Pennsylvania. Dismayed by the increasing population of Berks Country, the Boones in 1751 move to the Yadkin River Valley in North Carolina. Nine years later, Native American raids force Boone and his wife and children to move briefly to Culpeper, Virginia. But they return to the Yadkin River Valley, which remains their home until they move with other settlers through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky.

The narrative vividly describes the dangers and the joys of pioneer life as it follows Boone's series of "long hunts" into Georgia, Florida, and Kentucky; his participation in General William Braddock's unsuccessful wilderness campaign against the French and the Native Americans, as well as the Tennessee campaign against the Cherokee and Lord Dunsmore's expedition down the Ohio River in pursuit of Cornstalk; his role in opening the Kentucky territory to white settlers; his time as a member of the Virginia legislature; his capture by the Shawnee; and his final twenty years, spent with his family on the banks of the Femme Osage Creek in Missouri, where he dies in September 1820.

## Social Sensitivity

America's social consciousness about the white settlers' treatment of Native Americans has changed dramatically in the fifty years since *Daniel Boone* was written. Daugherty fails to question the settlers' assumption that they had an unalienable right to the land that Native Americans had lived off of for centuries—an assumption that led to tragic consequences for Native American culture. The text refers to Native Americans as "savages" and "varmints," and the lavish illustrations depict them viciously attacking white settlers. The racist assumptions underlying the narrative are apparent in the description of the white renegade Girty: "He hated and fought his own race with a cunning and brutality that surpassed the fiercest savage." Parents and teachers should discuss with readers how attitudes on this subject have changed over the past several decades as Americans have come to realize that the conflict between Native Americans and settlers was not a series of noble battles but genocide.

## Literary Qualities

Written by an excellent storyteller, this fast-paced narrative presents only the most exciting and important episodes in Boone's life. The author views Boone's life as representative of American westward expansion and recounts his story in an idealistic tone, lending an epic quality to the work. References to Boone's serving in Braddock's army under the command of George Washington, and to the presence of the Lincoln and Hanks families in a group of settlers Boone leads to Kentucky, connect Boone with other legendary American heroes.

Daugherty delineates the characters and the physical setting with an artist's eye for thorough observation and vivid detail. Although Boone is the central figure and the only one fully developed, the other characters are still carefully drawn. The wilderness becomes a character in its own right as Daugherty describes the Kentucky landscape in poetic language and provides it with a voice.

Daniel Boone exhibits Daugherty's mastery of language. The book opens with a poem, "Pioneer Babies," written in a style reminiscent of Walt Whitman.

Throughout the narrative, the author infuses the rich language with colloquial terms, a technique that recalls Carl Sandburg's work, which Daugherty sometimes illustrated.



# Themes and Characters

Daugherty's biography portrays Daniel Boone as an example of the individual's potential for achievement. The author suggests that Boone embodies the best characteristics of all the pioneers and that his successes are a direct result of his adherence to American ideals. Lacking formal education and wealth, he performs great feats by relying on his own merits. Boone's ability to survive alone in the harsh wilderness stems from his intelligence, resourcefulness, bravery, and independence. Because of his capacity to lead, his neighbors elect him to the Virginia legislature and the Spanish commandant commissions him as a magistrate.

His concern for others leads him to undertake long, dangerous journeys to rescue explorers and warn settlers of impending attacks by Native Americans.

Daugherty depicts Boone as generally treating adversaries, whether Native Americans or the forces of nature, with fairness and respect. The Shawnee become so fond of Boone after they capture him that Chief Black Fish adopts him as a son.

Although Boone has been regarded by many, even his contemporaries, as an almost mythical hero, Daugherty does point out some of his faults. Careless and impatient, Boone chooses to ignore all sorts of restrictions, ranging from spelling rules to land-grant laws. He pays dearly for his inattentiveness, eventually losing all of his land in Kentucky and Missouri. Boone also has a destructive side that contradicts his love for nature. He and his friend John James Audubon "bark" squirrels for sport in an episode Daugherty describes as "fun for everybody but the squirrels."

Likewise, Boone's efforts to open the wilderness to settlement ironically destroy the wilderness. As soon as a large group of settlers appears, he feels crowded and compelled to move on to new, unexplored territory.

Well-drawn sketches of various historical characters associated with Boone bring the biography to life. Other frontiersmen portrayed include George Rogers Clark, Simon Kenton, and the "long hunter" John Finley, whose tales of the Kentucky wilderness inspire Boone's ventures. Daugherty indicates that the Cherokee and Shawnee are sometimes savage when defending their land against encroachment by the white settlers, but he also points out the nobility and cleverness of leaders such as Cornstalk and Black Fish. The British generals Hamilton and Tarleton are described as humane, and even the ineffectual General William Braddock's faults are treated gently. Daugherty reserves his harshest judgments for the renegades such as Girty and McKee, who disregard not only legal details but the spirit of the law as well.

Little information is provided about Boone's family life. A skillful blacksmith and devout Quaker, his father, Squire Boone, demonstrates some of Daniel's sense of adventure when he moves his family from Pennsylvania to the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina. Boone's brothers Squire and Edward, also courageous frontiersmen, join him on "long





hunts" into Kentucky. Although his wife, Rebecca Bryan, plays a minimal role, Boone's children—James, Israel, and Jemima—receive some attention.

Despite their talents as woodsmen, James and Israel are both killed by Native Americans. On the other hand, Jemima deceives her Native American captors and leaves a trail for her rescuers, suggesting an ingenuity worthy of her father.

As the author praises the courage, resourcefulness, and respect for nature that he believes characterized those involved with the development of the American frontier, he laments a deterioration of these values in twentieth-century America. Distressed by the vandalism and litter found at some historic sites, Daugherty urges readers to cultivate an awareness of the heroes and deeds of the past.



## Topics for Discussion

1. Although Daniel Boone is involved in battles with various Native American tribes for most of his life, he does not seem to hate them, as many other pioneers do. What is his attitude toward the Native Americans? How does it differ from our attitude today?

2. A frontier family did not define education as a modern family would.

What did a frontier family consider a proper education? In what specific ways does that differ from modern concepts?

What do these differences suggest about the changes in American culture since the days of Boone?

3. Daugherty mentions Boone's connections with George Washington and the family of Abraham Lincoln. What similarities do you see between Boone and these other American heroes?

4. Daugherty twice describes Boone's carelessness about paperwork. What conclusions does he intend the reader to draw from Boone's experiences?

5. Daniel and Rebecca Boone appear to have somewhat different attitudes toward the wilderness. Is Daugherty fair in his portrayal of Rebecca? Considering all that the Boones lose to the wilderness, which attitude do you agree with?

6. Daugherty suggests that Boone and Richard Henderson represent two sides of the American personality. What element in the American personality does each represent?

7. Boone frequently uses trickery in dealing with the Native Americans. He even allows them to believe that he will become one of them, and so Black Fish adopts him as a son. Is Boone fair in his dealings with the Native Americans?

Can his actions be justified?

8. Why do two different districts elect Boone to represent them in the Virginia assembly? What personality traits make him a good choice? Does his determination to repay all his Kentucky debts indicate that the people's confidence is well placed?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Early in his life, Boone was a member of General Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne during the French and Indian Wars. George Washington was a leader of the American colonial forces in this campaign. Using history books and other library reference sources, discuss the disastrous outcome of this expedition and explain why it failed.

2. Before the settlement of Kentucky, the area was the hunting ground of the Cherokee, Shawnee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Casawaba. Research the history of one of these tribes and explain what has happened to the tribe since the time of Daniel Boone. You might want to concentrate on an event such as Andrew Jackson's campaign against the Creeks or the Cherokee Trail of Tears.

3. Daugherty mentions other legendary frontiersmen such as George Rogers Clark, Richard Henderson, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark.

Investigate the career of one of these men; then compare his achievements with Boone's.

4. Daugherty refers to Boone's role in the American Revolution. Because the nature of warfare was different on the frontier, most people know little about the Revolutionary War battles in the West. Discuss one or more of the significant frontier battles of the Revolution, and explain why control of the frontier was important to both sides.

5. Frontier travel was dangerous, even for Boone. Research and discuss the difficulties a traveler might encounter.

6. The earliest biography of Boone, written by John Filson, established many of the Boone legends. Read Filson's biography, and compare it with Daugherty's.

7. Daugherty depicts Boone's visit with the artist John James Audubon.

Consult biographies and history books, and describe Audubon's travels, his work, and his importance as an artist and naturalist.

8. When Boone moved to Missouri, the territory was ruled by the Spanish. Research and discuss the way people lived and were governed in Missouri before the Louisiana Purchase made it a part of the United States.

9. Literary critics have suggested that Boone's popularity led to the publication of stories about other frontier heroes, both historical figures such as Davy Crockett and fictional characters such as James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo. Read an account of one such figure and compare him or her to Boone.



## For Further Reference

Bakeless, John. Daniel Boone. 1939.

Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1965. This very readable work, based on extensive research, probably remains the best Boone biography.

Bingham, Jane M., ed. *Writers for Children: Critical Studies of Major Authors since the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988.

Contains an extensive biographical and critical essay on Daugherty.

Brown, John Mason. *Daniel Boone: The Opening of the Wilderness*. Eau Claire, WI: E. M. Hale, 1952. Biography of Boone, covering from 1755 to his death, that emphasizes his role in the settlement of Kentucky.

Bruce, H. Addington. *Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road*. New York: Macmillan, 1910. Biography concentrating on Boone's part in U.S. territorial expansion.

Eckert, Allan W. *The Court-Martial of Daniel Boone: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1973. Fictionalized account that attempts to fill the gaps in the historical record of Boone's courtmartial.

Filson, John. *The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon, Formerly a Hunter, Containing a Narrative of the Wars of Kentucky*. 1784. Reprint. Xenia, OH: Old Chelicothe Press, 1967. Originally published as an appendix to *Filson's Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* and touted as an autobiographical account, this work was actually written by Filson and based on a series of interviews with Boone. The earliest Boone biography, it established many of the legends surrounding the frontiersman.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*. 2d ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Contains a brief biographical sketch and analytical comments on major works, along with a list of Daugherty's work as an author and as an illustrator.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold. *Daniel Boone*.

1902. Reprint. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971. Brief and accurate biography based on material gathered by Lyman Copeland Draper for his unfinished multi-volume Boone biography, this accurate work attempts to distinguish between historical fact and legend.

White, Stewart Edward. *Daniel Boone: Wilderness Scout*. Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1926. A somewhat romanticized biography meant to inspire American youth. Illustrated by Daugherty.

## Related Titles

Daugherty's favorite subjects were distinctively American. He wrote about the settlement of America in *The Landing of the Pilgrims* and about heroic individuals in *Abraham Lincoln, Of Courage Undaunted: Across the Continent with Lewis and Clark*, *Trappers and Traders of the Far West*, and *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman: Pioneers of Oregon*. Whether in poems such as *The Wild, Wild West* or in stories such as *Their Weight in Wildcats: Tales of the Frontier*, his work most frequently dealt with the American West. As an editor, too, he chose selections from American writers whose perceptions of individualism and patriotism had inspired him: *Waft Whitman's America*, *Henry David Thoreau: A Man of Our Time*, and *The Sound of Trumpets: Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

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