

Notable Trade Books

Judy D. Butler
Contributing Editor



Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan

Monkey Town: The Summer of the Scopes Trial

by Ronald Kidd

Michael G. Lovorn
The University of Alabama

State of Tennessee v. John T. Scopes tested the legality of the Butler Act which made it unlawful for public school teachers "to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible." The media event became known as the "Monkey Trial" and brought a flood of publicity to rural Dayton, Tennessee, turning the creation vs. evolution debate into a national conversation. This dialog and debate caused Americans to consider the powerful influence of traditional religious beliefs and to examine how ideology fares when challenged by modernism and the advancement of scientific theory. Accordingly, the Scopes Trial is included in national curriculum standards for middle grades to foster historical inquiry and encourage students' contemplation of concepts and factors associated with human thinking, feeling, and behavior. The historical fiction in Monkey Town presents the trial and related hysteria through the observations of a 15-year-old local girl trying to discover what she believes. This lesson encourages learners to critically analyze the relationships between ideas and practices. It enables students' cursory exploration into issues and conflicts, allowing them to develop discussion and critical thinking skills by considering different perspectives in a historical setting.

Book Title

Kidd, R. (2006). *Monkey Town: The summer of the Scopes Trial*.
New York: Simon & Schuster.
ISBN: 978-1416905721
Suggested age level: 10 - 15

**Book
Summary**

Monkey Town: The Summer of the Scopes Trial by Ronald Kidd is a work of historical fiction centered on the original “Trial of the Century” which took place in July 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee. The novel is a first-person account of the events surrounding that particular summer and the trial of 1925. The main character is 15-year-old Frances, the daughter of F. E. Robinson who owned the town’s central drug store. Her intimate narration and personal reflections provide readers with a unique perspective on the events and the personalities surrounding the trial. Her descriptions of the setting and interactions with key players bring the trial to life through the eyes of a teenager who is coming of age and embarking on a philosophical journey of her own. During the trial, she questions her preconceptions of friendship, family, and religious beliefs. The book is a revealing and thought-provoking account of personal and social growth set during a compelling time in the country’s history. The author provides factual information about the trial, the city of Dayton, and each of the characters in the afterword.

**NCSS
Standards**

Standard Topics

IV. Individual Development and Identity

X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Materials

This lesson requires the following materials:

- Several copies of the book *Monkey Town: The Summer of the Scopes Trial* by Ronald Kidd
- Photographic images of the key players in the trial, the people of the region, and the era
- A projector (overhead, document camera, or similar)
- Copies of primary documents such as newspaper articles, letters, and trial transcripts
- “Record of Evidence” handouts (Handout #1)
- Large envelopes
- Pencils, markers, and notebook paper
- Poster boards that have been prepared with “Discussion Wheel” graphic organizer templates.

Objectives

1. After reading *Monkey Town: The Summer of the Scopes Trial* by Ronald Kidd, students use photographs and primary documents to analyze the Scopes Trial, the era, and the impact of the trial on the region.
2. By way of the jigsaw method, students investigate information packets and fill out “Record of Evidence” handouts. The six information packets/envelopes are labeled as follows:

Objectives

- A. The Era: The 1920s (the time Frances lived)
- B. The Setting: Dayton, Tennessee (where Frances lived)
- C. The Accused: John T. Scopes (Frances' teacher)
- D. The Prosecutor: William Jennings Bryan
- E. The Defender: Clarence Darrow
- F. The Reporter: H.L. Mencken of the Baltimore Sun

3. Students use the book and other materials to research and discuss the causes and effects of the Scopes Trial as well as the thoughts and observations of the main character (15-year-old Frances Robinson).

Procedures

Oratory Introduction Procedures (8-10 minutes)

**Exploration/
Introduction**

Explain that this book is a work of historical fiction that tells of a true event. Tell students they will be observing several photographs and primary sources related to the 1925 trial of John T. Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee. Invite students to recall what they have read about the "Trial of the Century," and based on their recollections, instruct students to outline the events on the board.

Development

Instructional Procedures (15-20 minutes)

Place students in four groups of six and direct each group to a "research station." Once they are in their research stations, number students off (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and explain that each student in each group is to become an "expert" regarding one element of The Scopes Trial (elements: the era, the setting, the accused, the defender, the prosecutor, and the reporter). There will be six expert groups, comprised of one member from each of the original four groups.

Each student receives a copy of the Record of Evidence handout (Handout #1). Explain that this handout is the "Record of Evidence" each student will use to become an expert on the element of the trial to which to she/he has been assigned, and each student is responsible for providing information for a culminating project that her/his group will complete together.

Present each expert group with a uniquely labeled informational envelope. Give students time to read and explore the items inside. Expert groups will confer about each item. They will make assumptions, draw conclusions, and come to an agreement on what notes to record on the Record of Evidence. Informal assessment is performed as the teacher moves around the classroom checking for understanding and randomly asking affirming questions throughout this portion of the lesson.

Contents of information packets

Envelope #1 (entitled “The Era: the 1920s”)

- Photographs from the 1920s (including flappers, jazz musicians, newspaper boys, early skyscraper construction, Langston Hughes, Amelia Earhart, Charles Lindbergh, Clara Bow, Charlie Chaplin, Jim Thorpe, Babe Ruth, etc.)
- Period newspaper articles on Al Capone, Prohibition, Lindbergh’s trans-Atlantic flight, the Stock Market Crash, etc.
- Paragraphs on the Harlem Renaissance, Presidents Coolidge and Hoover, the Silver Screen, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*, etc.
- Related descriptive excerpts from *Monkey Town*

Envelope #2 (entitled “The Setting: Dayton, Tennessee”)

- Period photographs of Dayton and rural East Tennessee, then and now (including the Rhea County Courthouse, the town square, the Tennessee River, local citizens, Bryan College, Tennessee Strawberry Festival, etc.)
- 1920 Census data for Rhea County demographics
- Period newspaper articles and advertisements from the *Dayton Herald* (known today as the *Rhea County Herald News*)
- Paragraph on the Butler Act
- Related descriptive excerpts from *Monkey Town*

Envelope #3 (entitled “The Accused: John T. Scopes”)

- Photographs of John T. Scopes, Rhea County High School, the football team, Scopes’ arrest, the trial, etc.
- Newspaper articles from the New York Times, the *Dayton Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Knoxville News*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and others
- Paragraph on Scopes science curriculum
- Related descriptive excerpts from *Monkey Town*

Envelope #4 (entitled “The Prosecutor: William Jennings Bryan”)

- Photographs of William Jennings Bryan, his arrival in Dayton, the trial, Bryan College today, etc.
- Excerpts from Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech and imagery from his numerous presidential bids
- Political cartoons from *Harper’s Weekly* and other periodicals

- Paragraph on the Creationists' point of view
- Related descriptive excerpts from *Monkey Town*

Envelope #5 (entitled “The Defender: Clarence Darrow”)

- Photographs of Clarence Darrow, his arrival in Dayton, the trial, etc.
- Paragraphs on Darrow's career as a lawyer, previous trials
- Political cartoons from *Harper's Weekly* and other periodicals
- Paragraph on the Evolutionists' point of view

Group Process Procedures (15-20 minutes)

After students have completed the Record of Evidence handouts in their respective expert groups, direct them back to the original research stations. Call for group discussions about the events leading up to, surrounding, and following the Scopes Trial. These simultaneous discussions are guided by teacher prompts and the following question list:

1. What was life like during the 1920s?
2. How could Dayton, Tennessee, be described in 1925? What is it like today?
3. Who was John T. Scopes? What was his job at Rhea County High School? What happened to bring about his arrest?
4. Who was William Jennings Bryan? What was his role in the trial? What ideas did he support? What did the people of Dayton think of him? What did others think of him?
5. Who was Clarence Darrow? What was his role in the trial? What ideas did he support? What did the people of Dayton think of him? What did others think of him?
6. Who was H. L. Mencken? What was his role in the trial? What sorts of things did he say in his reports? What did the people of Dayton think of him? What did others think him?

As research station discussions are taking place, distribute materials for the culminating poster project (six poster boards and colored markers). Briefly orient students to the design of the “Description Wheel” graphic organizer. Call for students to summarize, color-code, and compile relevant information into appropriate areas on the poster.

Expansion

Expansion Procedures

Affirm students' vocabulary comprehension by asking review questions. Ask several volunteers to imagine they were in Frances' position and discuss how they would have felt. Assign students to research more on the 1920s and to construct a time line of the era or the 20th century. Students may also watch all or portions of *Inherit the Wind* (1960) and plan a dramatic recreation of one or more scenes. Students may present to classmates.

Assessment

Invite students in each group to present their posters to classmates and post the finished products on the bulletin board. At the close of this lesson, the Record of Evidence handouts will be collected and will be examined by the teacher for accuracy. The completed handouts will serve, in part, as a formal summative assessment.

Suggested Extension Activities

Upon completion of this lesson, the teacher may extend the lesson in a variety of ways. Students may be asked to research the follow-up trials involving John T. Scopes and life after the trial for Scopes, Darrow, Bryan, Rappleyea, and others. The teacher may allow students to use what they have learned from these activities to construct an additional chapter to the book.

Students may also chronicle the legacy of the Scopes Trial relating to school law and/or religious expression in the United States by investigating other significant court cases. For this activity, the teacher may contact the First Amendment Center (of the Freedom Forum) and Teaching Tolerance Initiative (of the Southern Poverty Justice Center) for free materials.

Additional References

Scopes Trial Resource Websites

- Famous Trials in American History
<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes.htm>
- Historical Thinking Matters
<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/>
- National Geographic Magazine Online
http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/09/01/html/ft_20010901.7.html
- NPR Timelines – Remembering the Scopes Monkey Trial
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4723956>
- PBS American Experience – Monkey Trial
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/monkeytrial/index.html>

- Teaching Tolerance
<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/?source=redirect&url=teachingtolerance>
- Tennessee History for Kids
http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org/places/scopes_museum
- The First Amendment Center
<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>

About the Author

Michael Lovorn is an Assistant Professor of History/Social Studies Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Alabama.

Primary contact email: mlovorn@bamaed.ua.edu

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Handout 1

Name: _____ Group: _____

RECORD OF EVIDENCE – The Scopes Trial

I AM AN EXPERT IN _____.

Things I learned from the photographs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Things I learned from the newspaper articles:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Things I learned from the cartoons and other images:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Things I learned from the book:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Books.google.ru - The year is 1925 and Dayton, Tennessee, is the hottest and the sleepest place on earth. That is, until the day fifteen-year-old Frances Robinson's dad has John Scopes arrested for teaching evolutionary theory in schools. Overnight, the world's most famous thinkers are flocking to Dayton to ask, "Are