

Title of Book: Thank You, Sarah

Author: Laurie Halse Anderson

Reviewer: Fran O'Malley

Targeted Grade Level: Grades 6-8

Benchmark Targeted: Civics 4 [Participation]

Students will follow the actions of elected official, and understand and employ the mechanisms for communicating with them while in office.

Essential Questions: How can a citizen communicate with elected officials? Why is it important for citizens to communicate with elected officials?

Book Summary: Sarah Josepha Buell Hale is a name that few Americans recognize but Laurie Halse Anderson's *Thank You, Sarah* may end decades of inexplicable obscurity. Tomorrow, millions of Americans begin a welcomed vacation and travel great distances to give thanks for family, food, football, and countless other blessings that escape the attention of most the remaining 364 days of the year.

Thank You, Sarah is the story of a remarkably persistent woman who labored for four decades to "save Thanksgiving" after post-Revolutionary Americans lost interest in the tradition. Hale, as the author points out, was a real-life "Superhero" who lobbied elected officials at every level of government for a national day of Thanksgiving. Amazingly, Hale's "secret weapon" was a pen!

After writing thousands of letters and four American presidents, Hale's success arrived in the wake of a Civil War as a beleaguered nation yearned for something to celebrate. On September 28, 1863, Hale wrote to President Lincoln "to have the day of our annual Thanksgiving made a National and fixed Union Festival..." Her moment came on October 3, 1863 when President Lincoln issued a proclamation inviting his "fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens..."

This honored American feast continues uninterrupted as a result of Sarah Josepha Buell Hale's communication with elected officials. Thank you, Sarah!

How the essential question is addressed in the book: Delaware Civics Standard 4 focuses on Participation. In grades 6-8 students are expected to follow the actions of elected officials, and understand and employ the mechanisms for communicating with them while in office. Effective citizens play important roles as monitors and checks on those to whom we have entrusted power. They also actualize the basic principles of popular government by making their wants and interests known to those who legislate.

In *Thank You, Sarah*, Laurie Halse Anderson provides social studies educators with a model of effective citizenship and participation. Sarah Hale, like many other

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Americans, had a dream. What makes her special is that she acted persistently on that dream until it was fulfilled.

The literary talents of author Laurie Anderson and illustrator Matt Faulkner provide teachers with a wonderful vehicle for showing a generation of skeptical citizens how a pen can be an effective “mechanism” for communicating with, and motivating, elected officials. With a pen as her “weapon,” Hale became the citizen who “saved Thanksgiving.”

Thank You, Sarah is one of those very special children’s books that “kids” of any age will enjoy, especially on the fourth Thursday in November.

P.S. Readers of Anderson’s book also discover that Sarah Hale spent a lifetime looking out for the interests of children as she fought for playgrounds, argued against spanking and slavery, and wrote “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”