



**WHERE, WHAT, WHO, HOW, AND WHY**

**USING HOMER HICKAM'S**

**ROCKET BOYS**

**IN THE**

**CLASSROOM**

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## WHERE IN THE WORLD IS COALWOOD, WEST VIRGINIA?

*A Teacher's Guide to Using Rocket Boys in the Classroom*



### OVERVIEW

Rocket Boys by Homer Hickam can be used with multi-grade levels and in a variety of subject areas to not only inspire students to work hard to see that their dreams come true, but to also introduce and reinforce skills and concepts in some very creative ways. The following projects and activities were designed to be used while students are either reading the book independently or as a class. The activities can be used independently of each other or as a part of an entire unit. While most of the lessons can be geared and/or modified to any grade level, the book is best suited for upper elementary through high school. While this curriculum meets education standards in many content areas, it will be directly correlated to math, science, and technology standards.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Whenever an author writes a memoir, he is giving facts of his life in a narrative form, which should make the reader even more curious about the place(s) about which the author writes. This background information, in many cases, helps to make the story more coherent. Coalwood, West Virginia, is the setting of Rocket Boys. Homer Hickam does a beautiful job in helping the reader understand the heart and soul of Coalwood. This research activity is designed to provide students with a systematic way to find our information, both geographical and historical, about a specific place. Working as a class, students will use research skills to find specific facts about Coalwood. Students will then be asked to choose another place to research based on ideas introduced in the book.

### MATERIALS:

- Chart paper
- Sentence strips
- State, country, and world maps
- Internet access
- Resources that will provide geographical/historical information about worldwide locations
- Fact-Finding Sheet (Attachment #1)
- “Where in the World is \_\_\_\_\_?” Sheet (Attachment #2)

### PROCEDURE:

- Before introducing Rocket Boys to students, the teacher will ask if anyone knows anything about Coalwood, West Virginia. The teacher will explain to students that this is the setting for the book. What are some facts (geographical and historical) you would like to know about this place before reading the book that might make the book more meaningful or entertaining as you read it? Students should record answers on Attachment # 1.
- Each student will then identify one of the ten questions about which he/she is most curious and write that question on a sentence strip to display on classroom wall.



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- The class will then decide on ten questions (taken from previous responses) to research. The teacher will then divide the class into research teams. Each team will find the answers to the ten questions identified. The team must list at least two resources per question. The students will fill in questions on a team copy of Attachment # 1.
- In Rocket Boys (pg. 9), Homer says: “It always seemed exciting to me when I met somebody from exotic places like Keystone or Iaeger...” The teacher will then ask students where they think those places are located. In actuality, Keystone is only 18.6 miles from Coalwood. Iaeger is only 20.32 miles from Coalwood. Discuss why Homer considered places located so close to his home as exotic.
- Teacher will ask these questions: Whom do you know personally who lives the farthest distance from your hometown? Where is that place? This will be the location that each student researches individually following the same procedure used to research Coalwood. (Attachment #2)
- Each student will determine how to share information with the class (poster, PowerPoint, travel brochure, etc.) Each student will mark location on map of world or country.



## WHERE IN THE WORLD IS COALWOOD, WEST VIRGINIA? Attachment #1



**What do we want to know about Coalwood, West Virginia, and where can we find out?**

**1.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**WHERE IN THE WORLD IS COALWOOD, WEST VIRGINIA?  
Attachment #1**



**6.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**8.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**9.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**10.**

**Resources:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



WHERE IN THE WORLD IS \_\_\_\_\_?  
Attachment #2



What do I want to know about \_\_\_\_\_, and where can I find out?

1.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



WHERE IN THE WORLD IS \_\_\_\_\_?  
Attachment #2



6.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10.

Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_