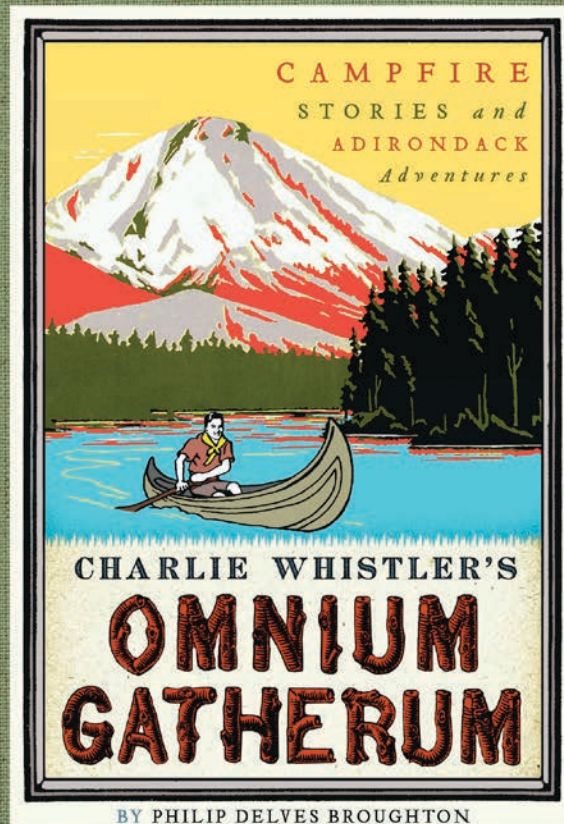


# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



**ALIGNED  
TO THE  
COMMON  
CORE**



HARPER

**ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADES 6-8.****About the Book**

Charlie Whistler is a boy who spends his summers in the Adirondacks. His family has been coming to the same cabin by Raquette Lake since 1878. Over the years, they have adventured far and wide and chronicled their experiences in letters to each other and stories in a family newspaper composed by the younger members of the family: *The Raquette Reporter*.

When they find a poem or a recipe or painting they like, they cut it out and stick it on the refrigerator door. At the end of each summer, they sweep whatever's there into a large box for safekeeping. And over time, each generation creates an *Omnium Gatherum*, a scrapbook of Whistler family wisdom, lore, and practical knowledge. It is their way of making sense of the many fascinating strands of experience.

*Charlie Whistler's Omnium Gatherum* celebrates the shared bonds of family, community, nation, and humankind. Its stories reflect the curiosity, creativity, humor, and kindness which make life such a grand adventure.

**About the Author**

Philip Delves Broughton is a *New York Times* bestselling author and journalist. He first visited the Adirondacks to report on a mule diving contest and fell in love with the place. He now lives in northwest Connecticut with his wife, two sons and two mischievous and well-fed beagles.

**Discussion Questions**

- Charles Wilberforce Whistler is inspired to visit the Adirondacks after reading Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Who was Thoreau and what did he mean when he said, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately"? Why did *Walden* have such an effect on Whistler?
- The letters in the *Omnium Gatherum* are written over 125 years. What binds them together?
- How do the stories and landscape of the Adirondacks connect with the Whistlers' family history?
- Does your family have any traditions or places that means something to all of you?
- The Whistlers loved the poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by the Irish poet W. B. Yeats. Why?
- Read the panels from the American Museum of Natural History. Why were these values so important to Theodore Roosevelt? Are they still relevant today?
- Why did Verplanck Colvin think it was so important in 1874 for the Adirondacks to be maintained in their "wilderness condition"? In what ways do we benefit today from the protection of natural wildernesses?
- Theodore Roosevelt said that his attitude to life could be summed up in two lines by the English poet, Thomas Mordaunt: "One crowded hour of glorious life/ Is worth an age without a name." Can you find examples of the Whistler family showing that they share this attitude?
- "Go light, the lighter the better, so that you have the simplest material for health, comfort, and enjoyment" (Nessmuk, *Woodcraft*). Explain why you think this is good or bad advice.
- Two phrases were carved into Apollo's temple at Delphi in Greece: "Nothing in excess" and "Know thyself". Why were these considered such important pieces of advice?
- In 1909, Charlie's great-grandfather heard a French forecaster say that by 2009, motorcars would be replaced by flying bicycles. Isaac Asimov also wrote a list of predictions to mark the 1964 World's Fair. Make five predictions for life a hundred years from now and explain them.

- When John Muir reached Florida at the end of his 1000-mile walk, he greeted a cabbage palmetto tree as if it were an old friend. After spending a violent storm up in the branches of a tree, he observed: “We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense.” Why does Muir think of trees and humans as fellow travelers?
- Baron de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, said that “the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.” Do you feel this spirit when you watch or play sports? Does the sport of Buzkashi, described in Henry Whistler’s letter from Afghanistan, reflect this spirit?
- Winston Churchill led Britain to victory in the Second World War, but was frightened of a blank canvas when he began painting. Have you ever felt like this at the start of a creative project? How did you overcome your fear?
- America’s national symbol is the bald eagle, but Benjamin Franklin would have preferred the turkey. What was his argument? Which animal would you choose and why?
- The architects of the Pompidou Center in Paris decided to put the pipes and elevators on the outside of the building. Does that make sense to you? Explain why or why not.
- Shark attacks have fascinated and terrified us for centuries. Read the stories of Bethany Hamilton and Brook Watson, which happened 254 years apart. What do they have in common?
- William Carlos Williams’ poem “The Great Figure” and Charles Demuth’s painting *The Figure 5 in Gold* were both inspired by the sound of a fire engine going down a street in New York. How have these two artists chosen to convey their experience? Find a poem and draw or paint a picture based on the same theme, or find a painting and write a poem.
- Think of a friend, family member, or character from history and write a letter to yourself as if from that person. Try to capture their voice. What can you convey through a letter that you cannot otherwise?
- What do we learn about Charlie Whistler’s character from the items he chooses to include in his *Omnium Gatherum*? Describe him.
- Pick a famous historical event and describe it as if you were a participant. (Read the letter about Theodore Roosevelt’s night ride for inspiration.)
- Choose one of the following phrases. Name the literary device being used and, in your own words, describe what they author wants us to feel:
  - “His age seemed to slide right off him.”
  - “He gave me the stink eye.”
  - “He seemed like an object carved from the New York earth, imperturbable and grave.”
  - “May you all have wildness in your blood!”
  - “Quicker than a frightened rabbit.”
  - “The bracing, green water, so cold it makes my teeth ache.”
  - “Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth/ And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings.”
  - “You can read about fear, or hear about it. But there’s nothing like feeling its clammy fingers close around your heart to make you pay attention.”
- “Irony’s when you’ve got a dog called Lucky and it gets run over by a car.” How would you define irony?
- In his letter from Afghanistan to his niece Kathleen, Henry Whistler repeatedly compares his adventures in the Middle East to incidents and experiences in the Adirondacks. Why does he do this?
- Read Robert Kennedy’s speech after the assassination of Martin Luther King. Describe the mood in that place at that moment. How does Kennedy establish a connection with the crowd?



## Ideas for Further Inquiry and Activities

- Do you have any great family stories that get told year after year? What captures the interest of your family when you get together? Write a letter to Charlie Whistler about yourself and your family.
- Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Thousandth Man" is about loyal friends. What's the difference between regular friends and "the thousandth man"?
- Brice Marden found inspiration for his ribbon paintings from Chinese art and calligraphy. He then used sticks he found on the streets of New York to paint. Find an unusual implement and use it to create a work of art.
- Claes Oldenburg found inspiration from the most ordinary objects, clothespins, buttons and hamburgers. Why do you think he decided to make art based on these objects? Pick something similarly ordinary and reproduce it at a different scale or using different materials.
- Why is there so much information crammed onto a dollar bill? Do you think we'll still be using dollars bills in 50 years time? Why do we need money?
- Watch Robert Kennedy's speech following the assassination of Martin Luther King. How does watching him and his style of delivery change your impression of the speech?
- Why are Teddy Bears named after Theodore Roosevelt?
- Who are all the artists mentioned in the *Omnium Gatherum*? Research and write a paragraph on one of the following: Winslow Homer; John Singleton Copley; Vermeer; Rembrandt; John Constable; Brice Marden; Claes Oldenburg; Ansel Adams; Charles Demuth; Francesco Borromini; Richard Serra; Walter de Maria.
- Who were the Great Khan, the mighty Genghis, and Alexander the Great?
- Verplanck Colvin mapped the Adirondacks. Research and write a paragraph on how you would map a region as vast as the Adirondacks today.
- When William Beebe and Otis Barton descended into the ocean in their bathysphere, they said they felt as "isolated as a lost planet in outermost space." James Cameron said that going to the bottom of the ocean was like traveling to another planet. What did they both mean? How does your environment change as you descend into the ocean?
- John James Audubon decided to paint America's birds. If you were to try to catalog one of every kind of thing, what would you choose? And how would you go about building your catalog? Try making a page in your notebook look like Audubon's by writing horizontally then vertically on the same sheet.
- Walter De Maria's "Lightning Field" is an example of "land art." It's a very different idea of art from a painting or sculpture. What do you think makes something "art"?
- Charlie's mom writes to him: "People often say they are happy when they are wallowing in a warm bath or eating a bowl of ice cream. But really, being happy is an activity. Happiness involves doing, thinking and feeling." Is she right?
- "It's never a bad idea to take the way you live and think and give it a good shake from time to time." What does this mean? Have you ever tried doing this? If so, why, and what happened?
- The back cover of the *Whole Earth Catalog* reads "Stay Foolish. Stay Hungry." What does that mean? Why do you think it is a popular catchphrase in Silicon Valley and among entrepreneurs?
- When George Washington was 16, he copied out a list of rules for civility and decent behavior. Does his list still make sense today? Add five rules of your own.

## Classroom Extensions

- Create your own *Omniium Gatherum*. Use a notebook and fill it with family photographs, letters (fictional or not) and favorite clippings.
- Organize a Fourth of July celebration with games, hot dogs, flag folding, and all four verses of The Star Spangled Banner.
- Make a copy of a dollar bill and annotate it.
- Learn about Winston Churchill's political and military achievements, then read about his many hobbies, from laying brick to painting.
- Design your ultimate tree house. ([Treehouse Masters on Animal Planet](#))
- Study or visit Richard Serra's sculptures at [Dia Beacon](#).
- Organize a World's Fair night at school. Have stands from different countries and make a list of predictions for the future.
- When it snows, organize a "Winter Olympics". Make up your own events and medal ceremony.
- Pick a favorite poem and draw or paint a picture that conveys a similar meaning or feeling.
- Pick a national park or wilderness area and research its history, its environmental significance, and the artistic or literary works it has inspired.
- Read with:
  - *A Man Who Walked Between Towers* by Philippe Petit
  - *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George
  - *Far North* by Will Hobbs
  - *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London
  - *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen
  - *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George
  - *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen
  - *The Dangerous Book for Boys* by Hal and Conn Iggulden

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