



Will Rogers: Oklahoma's Native Son

by Darleen Bailey Beard

Instructional Guide for Teachers



Darleen Bailey Beard, Author

Will Rogers: Oklahoma's Favorite Son

Darleen Bailey Beard is the author of several award-winning books for children, including chapter book *Annie Glover is NOT a Tree Lover* (National Green Earth Book Award); chapter book *The Flimflam Man* (a Junior Library Guild Selection); novels *The Babbs Switch Story* (Oklahoma Book Award) and *Operation Clean Sweep* (Amelia Bloomer Award), and picture book *Twister* (starred & boxed review). Darleen loves history and was happy to write this biography on Will Rogers who is considered to be one of the most important men to have come from Oklahoma. "He's such an interesting and honorable man," Darleen said. "As I did my research, I kept thinking, 'How could one man be this talented, *and* have such a compassionate, gentle, and loving heart?'" Will passed away suddenly in 1935 with another talented Oklahoman, aviator Wiley Post. "Will and Wiley were good buddies and both eagerly promoted the safety of flying back when flying in airplanes wasn't considered very safe, unfortunately though, it was a plane crash that killed them both. Today, traveling by airplane is considered to be the safest way to travel, even safer than cars."

Copyright Information

The content of this teacher's guide is under 2015 copyright to Oklahoma Hall of Fame Publishing. It is available at no cost for educational use, but it cannot be sold or published without express written permission of Oklahoma Hall of Fame Publishing.

Note to Teachers

This teacher's guide for **Will Rogers: Oklahoma's Favorite Son** is designed for use in the classrooms of third through fifth grade students. However, teachers of other grades can easily modify the lessons and activities to match the level of their students.

This guide was created to be used in the classroom to supplement subjects of English language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. Many activities also use music, visual arts, games, movies, and drama to engage students in the learning process.

Whether teachers use the Common Core State Standards or Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame Publishing purposely tried to integrate relevant standards and skills from both into these lessons and activities.

Table of Contents

English Language Arts	5
Social Studies	7
Mathematics	9
Science	9

English Language Arts

Hold up the book *Will Rogers: Oklahoma's Favorite Son* and tell students that this book is a biography—a true, nonfiction text about a real person's life. Discuss how nonfiction is structured to make it easy on the reader to find all needed information. Point out the Table of Contents; Text Boxes; Quotes; Places, Sites, & More; Glossary; Timeline; Fun Facts; Will Rogers Says; and other book parts. Help students understand how the different parts can be used to better understand the text. Point out that boldfaced words in the text are words listed in the glossary. Point out how the text boxes, maps, photos, and captions also help students to better understand the biography.

Read the book aloud to the students or ask volunteers to read aloud passages from the text, including text boxes, quotes, and photo captions. Then ask students questions about the text:

- Q:** What type of book is this? **A:** biography
- Q:** How is this book organized? **A:** in chronological order but Chapter 1 focuses on Will's accomplishments
- Q:** Why do you think the girls in Will's school nicknamed him 'Wild Indian'? **A:** because back in that time, Indians were considered to be wild and carefree. Since Will skipped school, lassoed the girls' ankles, and even lassoed his teacher's hat off his head, the girls thought he was wild and carefree
- Q:** Why do you think Will didn't want to take over the family cattle business? **A:** He wanted to see the world and travel.
- Q:** Where do you think Will got his love of pranks? **A:** from his mother who also loved to play pranks, such as baking a cotton-stuffed pie for a ranch hand
- Q:** What can you infer as the reason Will had such a compassionate heart and helped so many people? **A:** because his mother was very loving and compassionate and he was a lot like her; he saw how she loved everyone and gave them gifts, so he did the same thing, no matter how rich or poor, and no matter the color of their skin
- Q:** What are some of the many nice things Will did for people? **A:** In first grade, he helped the girls who had torn dresses by asking his mom to send material and his teacher sewed those girls new dresses. As a teenager, he helped his friend, Anderson Rogers, who was injured in a shooting accident by offering to pay for a false arm, offering to pay for his future education, and even telling the druggist and grocer to give Anderson anything he needed and Will would pay for it. He also helped out in times of world emergencies, such as floods, earthquakes, tornados, etc. He gave money to the Red Cross and Salvation Army, too)
- Q:** Will loved throwing his lasso and managed to turn that into a career combined with political humor. Do you have something you love to do that could one day be turned into a career? **Discuss.**
- Q:** Have you seen any of Will's movies? Which ones? What did you enjoy the most about them? **Discuss.**

Activity #1: Drama

Help students put on their own variety show like the show Will used to do when he traveled with Texas Jack's Wild West Show. Students can sing, dance, juggle, throw a lasso, do a comedy routine, tell jokes, etc. Have students write a program for their show and invite other classes to come see the show.

Activity #2: Visual Arts

Help students make a western vest from a brown paper grocery bag. Turn the bag inside out, so all advertising is on the inside, and the outside is plain brown. Cut a hole for the neck in the bottom of the bag and then cut a line straight down from the neck hole so that there is an opening for the student to get inside. Cut an armhole on each side of the bag. Direct students to color their vests with crayons, markers, and attach fringe, glitter, buttons, yarn, etc. Will's show name was "Cherokee Kid." Have students come up with their own show name and write their name on the back of their vest.

Activity #3: Writing

Discuss how Will traveled all over the world throwing his lasso and making people laugh. Ask students to write an essay about a place they would like to visit. Tell them to answer the following questions in their essay:

- Q: What place would you like to visit?
- Q: Why do you want to go there?
- Q: Where is this place located?
- Q: What makes this place so appealing?
- Q: Where would you stay?
- Q: What would you do?
- Q: Who would you take with you?

Activity #4: Music & Dance

Discuss how Will and his wife both loved music. In fact, Will saw his wife for the very first time when he went to the post office to pick up a mail-order banjo.

Help students to turn one section of the classroom into a "barn dance" with bales of hay and hay spread on the floor. Then play several selections of recorded old-time banjo music, letting students wear their vests from Activity #2, and throw a pretend barn dance, introducing students to country and western dancing and music.

Activity #5: Movie Interpretation

Show one of Will's many movies and discuss the various elements of writing that make a good movie: setting (place), main characters (main people in the movie), conflict (problem), theme (what the movie is about), and conclusion (how the conflict is solved).

Ask students write down the theme of the movie. Also, have students to write down the names of the main characters and a few words to describe each character, the conflict, the setting, and the conclusion. Then discuss the importance of these elements and how they are also used in book writing as well as script writing.

Social Studies

Remind students that Will's grandfather, Robert Rogers Jr., was one of the first Cherokee Indians to move into Indian Territory and that he helped develop the Cherokee Nation. Ask students to look at the Oklahoma map in Chapter 2. Discuss how Oklahoma was once known as "Indian Territory" before it became a state. Ask students the following questions:

- Q:** What state do you see on this map? **A:** Oklahoma
Q: What did Oklahoma used to be called before it became a state? **A:** Indian Territory
Q: Where is the Cherokee Nation? **A:** Northeast Oklahoma
Q: What was Will's house called? **A:** White House on the Verdigris
Q: What is the Verdigris? **A:** a river

Tell students that Will was named after William Penn Adair who was a well-known Cherokee leader. Have students do research on this leader and then write an essay about him including these facts:

1. Who was William Penn Adair?
2. What is he most known for?
3. Where was he born?
4. How did he become such a great leader for the Cherokee people?
5. What did he accomplish during his lifetime?
6. When did he die and at what age?

In Chapter 4, there is a quote by poet Carl Sandburg comparing Will to Abraham Lincoln. Read this quote aloud to students. Discuss why this poet compared Will to a much-loved president who is considered by many to be one of the most influential presidents the U.S. has ever had. Then direct students to compare this quote to the quote in Chapter 1. Discuss how these quotes are similar.

Tell students that Will named one of his horses Teddy after the president. Ask them to guess which president that was—President Teddy Roosevelt. Help students to do research on Teddy Roosevelt and then ask them to write one paragraph about what they like best about this president. Then collect their paragraphs and read aloud in class and discuss.

Ask students look at the map in Chapter 9 and then ask students the following:

- Q:** What state is this? **A:** Alaska
Q: Where is Point Barrow? **A:** at the northern-most part of Alaska
Q: Where did Wiley and Will's plane go down? **A:** just a few miles south of Point Barrow

Ask students to look at the *Will Rogers Says* page at the end of this book. Explain that these quotes are sayings of Will's which other people think are clever and so they repeat these sayings to other people. Discuss some of your own quotes that students will easily recognize. Such as: "There's no

such thing as a dumb question” or “Don’t bother your neighbor.” Discuss other quotes students might easily recognize: “It’s a wonderful world”, “There’s no place like home”, “Reading opens doors”, “Home is where the heart is”, etc. Read aloud Will’s famous quotes and discuss what they mean. Ask students which quote is their favorite and to tell why. Ask students to find Will’s quotes in each chapter and to tell what the quotes means.

Activity #1: Writing

Help students to come up with their own quotes. Discuss how quotes can be silly or serious and how they usually make good sense and are worth repeating. Ask students if their parents or grandparents have any good quotes they can remember. (If you can remember some quotes your parents or grandparents said, share these with the students, such as: “Don’t take any wooden nickels” and “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”.) Ask students to think up two or three of their own quotes and to write these down on notebook paper. (Maybe these would be quotes that they might one day tell their own children, such as “Brush your teeth every night!” or “Don’t play with a knife.”)

Then tape mural paper to a classroom wall. Put a heading on the mural: “Kid Quotes” or “Kids Say the Silliest Quotes.”

Then with a camera, take a close-up photograph of each student’s head with his/her mouth open. (These can be side views or face views of their heads.) Print these “heads” onto 8” X 11” white paper, so that the photo is about the size of their actual head. Ask students to cut off the background from their photos, so that all they have left is their “head.” Then give each student a word-bubble (a piece of paper cut into a round circle with a pointed V-shape on the side), like this:



Ask students to choose their favorite quote from the ones they wrote down on notebook paper and to write this quote in their word-bubble. Then help students glue their “head” onto the mural and then glue the word-bubble coming out of their “head’s” mouth.

Activity #2: Invite a Will Rogers Impersonator or Museum Specialist to your School

Invite a Will Roger’s impersonator to your school to do rope tricks for the students. You can find an impersonator through Will’s museum in Claremore. (See back of book for contact information) The museum also has a FREE program where they send trunks to your school that are filled with show-and-tell items from Will’s life and you can get a variety of these trunks for different grade levels.

Activity #3: Maps and Globes

Show students a world map or globe and discuss how Will traveled all over the world to perform his rope tricks. Name some of the places he traveled and ask students to point out these places—Alaska, Arkansas, Australia, California, Missouri, South Africa, Texas, and to circle the earth three times with their finger. Tell students that Will went around the entire world three times. Ask students to point to the state where Will was born (Oklahoma, then known as Indian Territory), to the state where Will died (Alaska), and to the state where Will lived at the time he died (California).

Mathematics

Ask students to listen to the following word problems and to answer the questions using a pencil and paper if necessary:

- Q:** If Will was born on November 4, 1879, and died on August 15, 1935, how old was he when he died? **A:** 55
- Q:** If Will had died on his birthday, how old would he have been? **A:** 56
- Q:** How many days short was Will of turning 56 when he died? **A:** 81 days
- Q:** Will's mom died in 1890 and his dad died in 1911. How many years longer did Will's dad live after his mom died? **A:** 21 years
- Q:** Will and Betty's children were born in 1911, 1913, 1916, and 1918. How many years apart were his youngest and oldest children? **A:** 7
- Q:** Betty died nine years after Will who died in 1935. In which year did she die?
A: 1944

Activity #1: Math Game

Write down some fun mathematical questions that pertain to Will's life. Make a list of questions equal to the number of students in the class. Divide the class into two teams and have the teams compete to see who can correctly solve the questions the fastest.

Activity #2: Graph

Show students the timeline at the end of the book and help students make a line graph using the years and events listed on the timeline.

Activity #3: Movie & Popcorn Prediction

Show students one of Will's many movies. Make popcorn and give each student a bowl. Have students predict how many pieces of popcorn they have in their bowl. Then have them count their popcorn pieces and discuss their predictions.

Science

Tell students that Will loved horses all his life. At age four, he could ride a horse. At age five, he could throw his lariat and lasso things. At age seven, he rode a horse to school every day.

Activity #1: Animal Research

Ask students to name what kind of animals they love. Then have them do research on these animals and write a one-page report including:

1. List the type of animal
2. Where does this animal live?
3. What does animal eat?
4. What type of activity does this animal do?
5. Do you currently own this type of animal?
7. If you don't own this animal, would you like to and why?

After students write their one-page reports, use them to teach editing skills, and then display on the wall under the heading: WE LOVE ANIMALS!

Activity #2: Cattle Business

Will's dad had a family cattle business. He raised cows and hoped Will would take over his business, but Will wanted to see the world instead. Ask students that if they were to take over his dad's cattle business, what type of things would they need to know about cattle?

Help students research cattle and to write a one-page report telling what cattle eat, how much food they require, how many different breeds of cattle there are, the types of cattle which are easiest to raise, what a baby cow is called (a calf), the amount of milk cows produce, what boy cows are called (bulls), what young girl cows are called who haven't had a baby yet (a heifers), the amount of land needed for each cow, and other important information that would help them to raise cows.

Activity #3: Music

Introduce students to music about animals. Sing "Old McDonald had a Farm" with the students and let each student pick out a different animal to sing about in the song.

Activity #4: Invite a Local Veterinarian to Visit your School

Invite a local veterinarian to speak to class about being an animal doctor. Have him/her discuss the type of education required and the type of science classes needed to become a veterinarian. Ask the veterinarian to tell students what a typical day is like and to share stories about the animals he/she has helped. Open the discussion up for student questions.

After the veterinarian leaves, ask students to write down the one thing that impressed them the most about this career. Then read these aloud and discuss as a class.