

# BOUNDARIES

*How the MASON-DIXON LINE settled a FAMILY FEUD & divided a NATION*

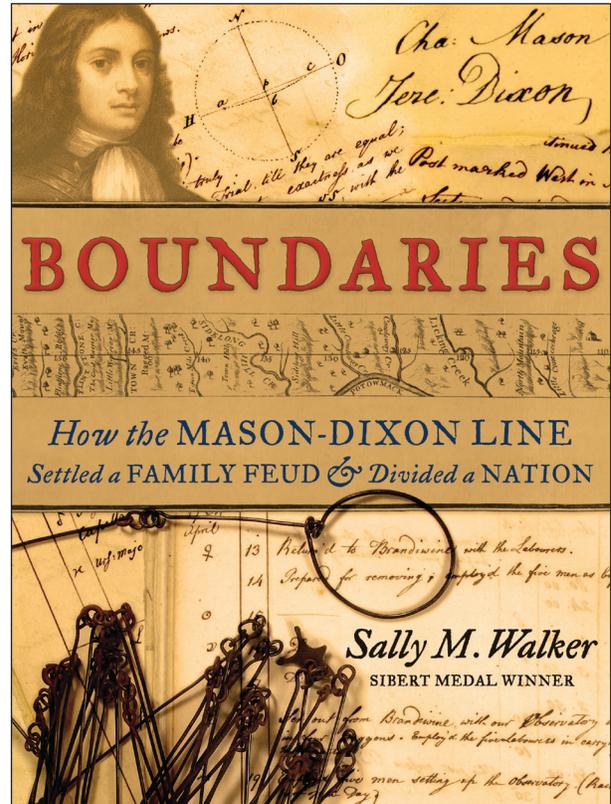
by *Sally M. Walker*

## ABOUT THE BOOK

The Mason-Dixon Line is best known as a well-established symbol of the divide between the North and the South during the Civil War. In fact, this symbolism is so strong that its history—the feud between two of America's first colonial families, ideological and religious differences, boundary disputes, surveying challenges, and scientific discoveries—has been overshadowed and seldom told. Award-winning nonfiction author Sally M. Walker meticulously documents the origins of the boundary, beginning with the ideological and religious beliefs, politics, dreams, and power (or lack thereof) that drove colonists to the New World to the disputes, dangers, and hardships involved in surveying boundary lines. Carefully researched, *Boundaries* details the events that led to the establishment of the Mason-Dixon Line as a boundary between a free state and a slave state, while reminding readers that this is the same line that forms the boundary between Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania today.



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### Young Adult Nonfiction and the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts are designed to scaffold student learning and encourage questioning strategies that ask students to tackle textual information. The standards place an increased emphasis on nonfiction texts. To assist educators with facilitating class discussions and designing class instruction for this nonfiction book, discussion questions in this guide are specifically aligned with the **Reading Informational Text** standards. Writing and research activities are designed to give students choice and are aligned with the **English Language Arts Writing** standards and the **Literacy in History/Social Studies** standards.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to pair up and write a definition of the word *boundaries*. How many different types of boundaries can they think of?
2. Have students discuss their understandings of the Mason-Dixon Line. Where is it? What meaning does it hold? After students share their understandings, correct any misconceptions, show them a map that illustrates the boundary line, and indicate that they will be reading about its origins and history.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In 1579, George Calvert was born in England to Roman Catholic parents. Describe the political and religious era in which he was born. How did religious beliefs affect social position? Discuss how George rose to political power and his motivation for wanting to establish a colony in the New World. Using explicit text evidence and inferences, explain why Cecil Calvert, George's son and lord proprietor of the Province of Maryland, believed in liberty of conscience. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.4, RI.9–10.4)
2. Discuss William Penn's childhood and teenage years. Consider in your discussion how his relationship with his father evolved over time and how his religious views developed and affected the establishment of the colony of Pennsylvania. Why did Charles Calvert and William Penn disagree about the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1)
3. When George Calvert received his Maryland charter, the location of the 40 degrees north line of latitude was unknown. In the early years of the Maryland and Pennsylvania colonies, this lack of information posed few problems; however, as time passed, it became clear that the location would have to be settled. Discuss these events and how the author orders them to illustrate the increasing need to pinpoint this exact location. Summarize the failed attempts to survey the boundaries. Identify challenges the surveyors faced and discuss why they were unable to overcome these obstacles. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.3, RI.9–10.3)
4. Who were Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon? Explain how their skills and experiences prepared them to be surveyors and how their skill sets complemented each other. Identify several challenges they faced and discuss how were they able to overcome these challenges and accomplish what other surveyors were unable to do. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.2, RI.9–10.2)

5. Mason and Dixon needed a large number of instruments to survey the boundary lines. Identify two instruments or essential pieces of equipment and discuss how they worked and why they were needed. Why was a large crew needed to assist Mason and Dixon? Who were the chain carriers? Describe how they did their work. Given that we live in a technological world, discuss how this work might be done differently today. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.4, RI.9–10.4)
6. Mason and Dixon endured many challenges, one being inclement weather. Discuss how the two survived the outdoors and the drudgery of their work. What or who drove them to succeed? Support your answers with evidence from the text. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1)
7. Mason and Dixon were assigned a surveying task that required them to travel across land belonging to the Six Nations. Crossing this land without permission could have had serious consequences. Discuss how they acquired permission and outline the sequence of events that led to their being able to travel and survey beyond colonial borders. Given the information in the text, discuss why traveling without permission would have been foolhardy. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.3, RI.9–10.3)
8. Walker writes, “Scientists of the day hypothesized that Earth’s gravitational force varied with latitude — so that, for example, the gravitational force along Pennsylvania’s latitude was different from that along Saint Helena’s latitude” (page 133). Discuss how Mason and Dixon’s observations helped prove this hypothesis. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1)
9. Within the historical narrative about the Mason-Dixon Line, the author has inserted historical points and scientific information (set apart from the text in italic sidebars) that relate to the events as they are narrated. For example, the opening chapter includes a sidebar on “Catholics and Protestants” (page 2) and chapter 7 includes a sidebar on “Native Peoples in the Pennsylvania and Maryland Provinces,” as well as one titled “How Long Is a Day?” Study two or three of these sidebars in relation to the chapters in which they appear. Discuss how they add to, or clarify, the chapter and/or the book. How do they make the reading more engaging? What other purposes do they serve? (RI.8.5, RI.9–10.5)
10. In chapter 12, the author describes the events that led up to the belief that the Mason-Dixon Line is both a geographical and a political boundary. Analyze this sequence of events and discuss how the series of events developed over time. Discuss the role that Pennsylvania’s 1780 abolition act played in identifying the Mason-Dixon Line as the boundary between free states and slave states. (RI.8.1, RI.9–10.1, RI.8.3, RI.9–10.3)

11. Define the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Compare and contrast how it was different from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. What role did the Mason-Dixon Line play in this law? Discuss how the Mason-Dixon Line became a symbol of freedom. (RI.8.1, RI.9.10.1, RI.8.5, RI.9–10.5)
12. The word *boundaries* has multiple meanings in the book. In addition to geographical boundaries, the term can also apply to cultural and religious boundaries, as well as to scientific limitations (or boundaries). Analyze any one of these additional meanings, or themes, and discuss how the author develops it throughout the book. (RI.8.2, RI.9–10.2, RI.8.4, RI.9–10.4)

## RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Choose a famous person who appears in *Boundaries* and read about him or her in at least three different sources, one of which is a primary document. Write a paragraph or essay in which you summarize any differences you find among the sources you consulted and/or discuss other observations taken from the three sources. Individuals to consider include: Charles Calvert, Jeremiah Dixon, Frederick Douglass, Charles Mason, William Penn, John Randolph, and Harriet Tubman. (RH.8.9, RH.9–10.9, W.8.2, W.9–10.2)
2. Assume the persona of either Charles Mason or Jeremiah Dixon and write a five-day journal, detailing your experiences on the survey project each day. What challenges do you encounter? How do you overcome them? What do you learn? (W.8.3, W.9–10.3)
3. Mason and Dixon relied on a number of instruments (such as a zenith sector, a circumferentor, a Gunter's chain, a transit and equal altitude instrument, and a Hadley's quadrant) as they observed the stars and surveyed the boundary line. Locate additional information about and images of one of these instruments and write a summary of your findings. (W.8.7, W.9–10.7, W.8.8, W.9–10.8)
4. Prior to the Civil War, several laws were passed concerning slavery north of the Mason-Dixon Line (including the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1780 and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850). Partner with a classmate and research slavery north of the Mason-Dixon Line prior to the Civil War and prepare a class presentation based on your findings. Use both the Internet and library resources in your research. Prepare a collaborative media presentation to share with the rest of the class. (W.8.6, W.9–10.6, W.8.7, W.9–10.7)

5. Read further about the lives of Charles Calvert and William Penn, then write a short research paper on one of these two men, using both Internet and library books and materials. Remember to cite sources appropriately. (W.8.7, W.9–10.7, W.8.8, W.9–10.8)
6. Mason and Dixon relied on constellations and stars to guide them as they recorded their observations. Locate a book in the library or resources online that identify constellations. With a partner, spend several evenings exploring the skies. Share your experience in any writing genre of your choosing. You may, for example, write a poem, a short narrative of what you observed, a descriptive paragraph, or journal observations. (W.8.2, W.8.3, W.9–10.2, W.9–10.3)
7. During the course of her research, Walker used many primary-source documents, including Moses McClean's account book, which are reproduced in this book. Ask students to compare the account list found on pages 104–105 with that on pages 142–143. Why did the number of crew members increase to include so many men? What jobs required the most men, and why? Can they find the names of men mentioned in the text among those listed in McClean's accounts? (RH.8.9, RH.9–10.9)

## ABOUT SALLY M. WALKER

Sally M. Walker is the author of the Sibert Medal winner *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine* as well as many other nonfiction books. About *Boundaries*, she says, "I've always enjoyed challenging the boundaries in my life. Researching this story made me think about my ancestors who settled in Pennsylvania in the early 1700s, only a few miles from Mason and Dixon's headquarters. If their paths ever crossed those of Mason and Dixon, I hope they asked them as many questions as I would have." Sally M. Walker lives in Illinois.



This guide was written by Dr. Pam B. Cole, associate dean of undergraduate studies and Distinguished Professor of English Education at Kennesaw State University, in Georgia. She has been in education (first as a middle-school and high-school English teacher) for more than thirty years and is the author of *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century*.