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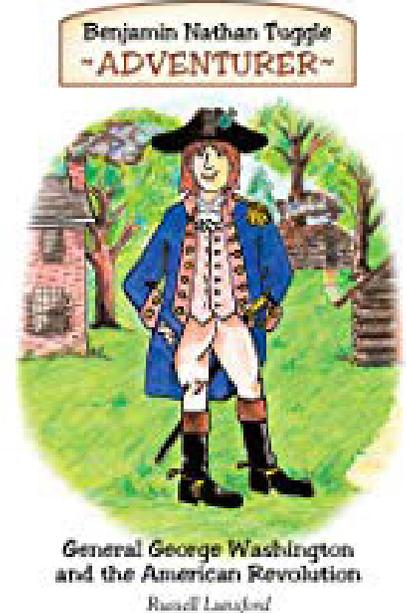
"Mountain Lamb" by David Wright. To see more of Mr. Wright's art, visit his website: [www.davidwrightart.com](http://www.davidwrightart.com)





# OUR CHILDREN AND AMERICAN HISTORY: THE VALUE OF HISTORICAL EDUCATION

By Russell Lunsford



Our televisions have hundreds of channels and although there may still be a few things worth watching, we have turned the remotes over to our children. Our cabinets are full of DVDs. Our computers and game sets offer children hours of mindless entertainment. American history is not high on their list of things to do. Is it forever lost to them?" The answer is no. It falls upon us as parents and educators to capture our children's attention. We must show them the American history that's more fascinating than anything they might watch on TV or play in a game.

History is important to children because it helps them to define who they are and who they might become. Although today's children have several self-absorbed role models to choose from, there are some wonderful alternatives in American history. People like George Washington, Daniel Boone, Abraham Lincoln and Harriett Tubman—people with integrity and

grit who despite overwhelming events contributed significantly to the building of our great nation.

If you are reading this article you no doubt share a love for American history, specifically Daniel Boone. After writing and publishing a novel about the Korean War in 2007, I decided to take a break from serious writing and write a book my grandchildren could enjoy. I wanted it to be fun to read and educational at the same time. From the beginning, I decided it would be about Daniel Boone.

My father grew up on Station Camp Creek a couple of miles from the Kentucky River in Estill County, Kentucky. We would visit my grandparents in the summer, run wild in the woods, and swim in the creek where Boone and his men had traveled and hunted.

Just like us, our grandparents knew their grandparents, who grew up when Kentucky was being settled. Most

of the stories they heard as children are now in history books. Did we hold still long enough to listen as our grandparents shared those stories? Of course not! There were trees to climb, creeks to swim, and Annie-Annie Over to play with our cousins. Tired and worn out at night, we listened to the Lone Ranger and Gun Smoke by lamp light on a battery-operated radio. When we snuggled upstairs in the big feather beds, we quietly strained to hear the radio below us in the parlor as the grown ups listened to the Grand Old Opry. I deeply regret not listening when the older folks talked about family history in the eastern Kentucky mountains. But in my defense, I was very busy child.

My first book taught me that writing historical fiction requires knowledge of the historical event. Although I created fictional characters to tell the story, I owed it to the Korean War POW veterans and their families to tell their story of struggle and

heartbreak historically correct. I felt the same commitment when I prepared to write my children's book. There are many good books on Daniel Boone. I started my research by reading *The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone*, by Michael A. Lofaro, along with *In the Footsteps of Daniel Boone*, by Randall Jones. I followed with *Frontiersman—Daniel Boone and the Making of America*, by Meredith Mason Brown, which I purchased during a research visit to Fort Boonesborough State Park.

I recorded pages of historical facts, but I wasn't sure how I would tell the story of Boone. I finally decided to create a fictional character that children could relate to. He would be a charming and witty twelve-year-old boy from Estill County in eastern Kentucky. He would travel back in history, meet up with Boone and return to tell about his adventure. The story fell into place and *Benjamin Nathan Tuggle-Adventurer: Daniel Boone and the Settlement of Boonesborough, Kentucky* was published in July of 2010.

Since that time, I have visited over forty elementary schools and talked about Ben and his adventure with Boone. In Kentucky, fourth and fifth grade children study Kentucky history. I open my presentation by talking about creative writing, share with the students how I work with my publisher to make a book, and move on to talking about Boone and the settlement of Kentucky.

I'll ask them who their favorite super hero is and tell them that Daniel Boone was a real life super hero. I tell them that you can't make up things that are more exciting than Boone's real life, and I believe that. I'll share the sacrifices the early settlers made, using Rebecca and Daniel's loss of family members as an example. I end the presentation with a reading from the Tuggle-Boone book and take questions.

We can't travel around in history like Ben Tuggle, but we can feel that excitement when we read and visit historical places. A fascination for history is something we can instill in our children by learning it ourselves

and sharing our interest with them. By sharing, I don't necessarily mean a lot of talk.

The character Ben Tuggle has a passion for American history. He has parents who take family trips to historical places. They take him to the public library when they go to town. Ben's parents and grandparents are part of his family history, and what's important to them is important to Ben. Many of the students I meet are excited when talking about visiting historical places like Fort Boonesborough, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, and Martin's Station. We should encourage our schools to plan field trips to such places. If your child's teacher schedules a field trip, take time off from work, if possible, and volunteer to chaperon a trip, and enjoy a day with your child. I still have vivid memories of my grandparents taking us to visit Fort Harrodsburg when I was a child. Every state in America has numerous historical places to visit. One of my favorite places is George and Martha Washington's home, Mount Vernon. Ben Tuggle's second adventure starts there when his family visits the Washington plantation during the American Revolution.

I have found that children are fascinated with history. Their questions and comments are genuine. Their need to understand is open, honest, and they thirst for knowledge. In my conversations with students, I never feel like I'm talking with children. They seem to raise to my level and conduct themselves as interested adults. Their curiosity is challenging. You will find this curiosity in your child if you will simply ask, sit quietly, and listen.

At the end of a presentation, I sometimes ask the children who they think Ben Tuggle should visit next. Their suggestions vary and include many of the great people in American history. I pay sincere attention to their ideas, and we have open discussions—except in one particular case. A young ten-year-old kept insisting that Ben Tuggle's next adventure be with

Zombies. He went on about Ben shooting Zombies in the head with a shotgun and even suggested that Boone could help. My attempts to convince him that Zombies were fictional characters and not real were ignored.

He was so persistent the other children got to giggling, and I lost control of the class. I finally gave the librarian a desperate look, and she quickly came to my rescue. She did not reason with him, as I had tried to do. She firmly told him to sit down and be quiet, which he did.

Boone and Zombies? Don't tell Hollywood.



**About the Author**

Russell Lunsford lives with his wife, Janice, on their family farm in Columbia, Kentucky. He is a retired administrator with the Kentucky Office for the Blind and a retired Chief Warrant Officer with the US Army Reserve. He has three children and five grandchildren. Russell is author of *Letters From A Captive Heart*, a historical fiction novel about the struggles, heartbreak and survival of Korean War POWs and their families. His Benjamin Nathan Tuggle-Adventurer series has two books: *Daniel Boone and the Settlement of Boonesborough, Kentucky* and *General George Washington and the American Revolution*. His most recent book, *Daniel Boone's Kentucky*, is written for ten to fourteen-year-old children and should be in print by the 2019 Christmas holidays.