



Core Knowledge **VOICES IN HISTORY™**

Alexander Hamilton

Building a Nation

by Anne Marie Pace

illustrated by Christopher Thornock

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INTRODUCTION

You might know Alexander Hamilton from his portrait on the ten-dollar bill. His portrait doesn't tell us much. It tells us that he was important enough to be on our money, but it doesn't tell us why.

You might remember learning about the Founding Fathers in school (he's one of them!), but you might remember George Washington and Thomas Jefferson before you think of Alexander Hamilton.

You *might* even know about that hit Broadway musical *Hamilton*, which is based on Alexander Hamilton's life.

Those are all reasons why you might know a little about Alexander Hamilton. But he was more than a portrait, more than someone to learn about for a history test, more than the inspiration for a musical. He was *so much more*.

1

Alexander's Childhood

Alexander Hamilton was born on the island of Nevis on January 11, sometime in the mid-1750s. From their home, the Hamilton family could gaze out at sandy beaches and the turquoise Caribbean Sea. Nearby were rich green rainforests and cascading waterfalls, along with interesting animals (especially monkeys!) and fruit trees, like mango, orange, and lemon trees. Tiny Nevis was probably a beautiful place to grow up.

But while the island had stunning tropical scenery, the people on Nevis did not necessarily live happy lives. There were diseases. There were natural disasters, like earthquakes and awful storms. And, as on most Caribbean islands at the time, people from Africa had been enslaved and brought to Nevis to work on plantations against their will. Sugarcane was a very popular commodity all over Europe and America, and the plantation owners believed they needed to enslave others in order to grow and produce enough sugar for the market.

commodity: something that is bought and sold

The Caribbean

The Caribbean is a region of the world consisting of thousands of large and small islands in and around the Caribbean Sea. Indigenous people—including the Taino, Kalinago, Guanahatabey, and Ciboney peoples, among others—lived on the islands for thousands of years. In 1492, Columbus sailed from Spain to the islands and claimed the region for Spain in spite of the fact that the land was already occupied. Europeans hoped to discover gold and other riches in the islands. At first the Spanish, and to a lesser extent the Portuguese, were the primary Europeans to settle in the Caribbean. They exploited and brutalized the Indigenous people. Over the next few centuries, the British, French, and Dutch also colonized and fought over different areas of the Caribbean. By the time Alexander Hamilton was born, the European colonists had developed a plantation economy requiring a great deal of manual labor. Their solution was to enslave African people to work in the Caribbean.

Alexander's mother's family, the Faucettes, had come to live in Nevis in hopes of making a fortune. His French grandfather, John Faucette, and his English grandmother, born Mary Uppington, were not rich, but they owned land and a few slaves. The marriage was not happy. And there was heartbreak. Outbreaks of diseases like yellow fever and malaria were common; of the seven Faucette

plantation economy: an economy based on mass-producing crops on large farms that are worked by laborers or enslaved people

yellow fever: a disease caused by a mosquito-borne virus that leads to fever, aches, and yellow skin

malaria: a disease caused by a mosquito-borne parasite that leads to periodic attacks of fever and chills

children, only Alexander's mother, Rachel, and her sister Ann survived. When John Faucette died, Rachel inherited a comfortable amount of money, and she moved with her mother, Mary, to another island, Saint Croix, to live near Ann and Ann's husband, James Lytton.

Rachel was beautiful, intelligent, and talented. At sixteen years old, with her personality and her fortune, many men would have liked to marry her. In 1745, possibly to please her mother, she chose to marry an older man named Johann Michael Lavien. Sadly, Lavien probably married her for her money. He was not a wise businessman, and he squandered almost all of Rachel's fortune. Lavien was unkind to Rachel, and even though they had a son, Peter, she decided to leave her husband.

Lavien was furious that Rachel had abandoned him. He said terrible things about her, ruining her reputation. Because of the laws at the time, he was able to have her imprisoned. She was imprisoned for several months with nothing to eat but fish and cornmeal mush.

But Rachel would not return to him. When she was released from jail, she moved to another island called St. Kitts. There, she used her sewing skills to support herself. Soon, she met a man named James Hamilton, Alexander's father. James was the fourth son of a Scottish laird.

squandered: wasted

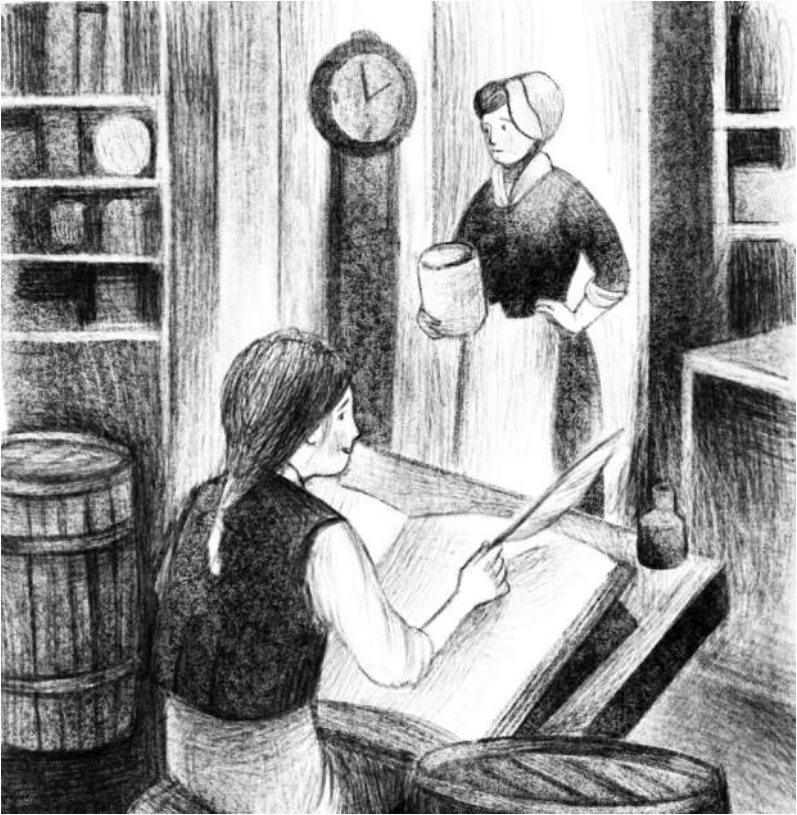
laird: a Scottish nobleman who owns a large estate

Even though James's father was important in Scotland, James would not inherit anything from him, so James had come to the Caribbean to try to make his own way.

Rachel was not yet divorced from Lavien, and when they did eventually divorce, she would not be allowed to legally remarry. But she and James moved to Nevis, where they lived together as husband and wife anyway. Their first son, James, was born around 1753, and Alexander was born sometime after that.

In 1765, when auburn-haired, blue-eyed Alexander was around eight to ten years old, James moved the family to the town of Christiansted, on the island of St. Croix. But less than a year later, James left the family for good. Alexander, his mother, and his brother were left alone.

Rachel was determined to take care of her sons. With the help of her sister's husband, she rented a two-story house at 34 Company Street. The family lived on the second floor, and Rachel ran a food store on the first floor—an unusual occupation for a woman at that time. She sold beef, dried fish, flour, rice, and other things local citizens needed. Alexander had a gift for mathematics, and he helped his mother with the bookkeeping. The family owned six spoons, seven teaspoons, some dishes, a single bed with a comforter, and some chairs. The profits from the store helped Rachel take care of her family.



Because Alexander's parents had not been married, some people gossiped about the family. They called them rude names. And Alexander was not allowed to go to the church schools that most other boys went to.

But Alexander desperately wanted to be educated. Even though he was somewhat small, thin, and weak, he was highly intelligent and learned quickly. His mother taught him to speak French. He attended a Jewish

school, where he learned the Ten Commandments in Hebrew. And he loved to read. His family owned thirty-four books, which was a huge library for a family at the time. Alexander read anything he could get his hands on, including poetry. He even wrote his own poems.

In 1768, Rachel became very ill with a fever. Alexander became ill soon after his mother. When they finally called the doctor, the doctor was unable to help them. Alexander survived the illness, but Rachel died on February 19. His father now lived on another island and was uninterested in having Alexander and James come to live with him.

After Rachel's death, a court of law affirmed that her first son, Peter Lavien, was Rachel's only legal heir. So Peter took their spoons, dishes, and furniture—although their cousin Peter Lytton made sure that Alexander could keep the books. The boys briefly went to live with their cousin Peter, but he soon died. They then went to live with Peter's father, their uncle James, but, unbelievably, he died, too.

James and Alexander weren't only penniless; they were utterly alone.

2

Alexander Doesn't Quit

After such a difficult childhood and a period of great loss, some people might have given up. But between a little luck and a lot of hard work, Alexander's fortunes began to turn. His brother, James, apprenticed with a local carpenter, and Alexander was taken in by his neighbors Thomas and Ann Stephens. The Stephens family had five children. One son, Edward, became Alexander's best friend.

Alexander also went to work. When Alexander had kept the books for his mother's store, he had crossed paths with many businessmen. Two of those businessmen were the owners of a trading company called Beekman and Cruger. Alexander took a job with them, and his world opened up.

In his new position, Alexander learned a lot about the world. David Beekman and Nicholas Cruger imported building supplies, furniture, food, and other necessities and luxuries, and they exported sugar, molasses, rum, wood, and cotton. While Alexander worked there, the

kept the books: recorded a business's income and expenses in a ledger, or book of accounts

molasses: a thick brown syrup made from raw sugar

cotton: soft, fluffy plant material that is spun into yarn or thread

company also brought enslaved people from Africa to work on plantations. Alexander was good at his work, but he, like his friend Edward Stephens, despised slavery, and he did not like that part of his job. He had seen the misery that being enslaved on a plantation caused.

In 1771, when Alexander was between fourteen and sixteen, his boss Nicholas Cruger traveled to New York City. Alexander was left in charge of the business in St. Croix for several months. He and Cruger wrote letters back and forth to each other. Cruger was very pleased with how well Alexander ran the company.

On the job, Alexander learned about international trade, money systems, business correspondence, and negotiating with ships' captains. He was a very good clerk, but he was starting to think bigger. "I wish there was a War," he wrote to Edward, who was studying in America. Alexander believed that being a soldier would open up opportunities for him that he would not get from working as a clerk.

Other people noticed Alexander's skills. Alexander became friendly with Reverend Hugh Knox, a Presbyterian minister who arrived in St. Croix in early 1772. They had common interests, including their dislike of slavery and their love of learning. Reverend Knox tutored Alexander, providing him with an education better than Alexander could have ever given himself.

Then on August 31, 1772, a terrible hurricane hit the island of St. Croix. The sea rose twelve feet. The wind and water destroyed houses, boats, and trees. After the storm subsided, Alexander wrote a letter to his father describing the mayhem. He wrote, “The roaring of the sea and wind, fiery meteors flying about it in the air, the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning, the crash of the falling houses, and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed, were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels.” He showed Reverend Knox his letter, and Knox suggested that Alexander submit it to the local newspaper. It was published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* on October 3, 1772.

Alexander’s letter dazzled many people on St. Croix. How could such a young man compose such a passionate and beautifully written letter? Reverend Knox, Nicholas Cruger, and other local residents believed that Alexander deserved a college education. So they took up a collection to provide him with a scholarship.

Soon, Alexander was shipboard, bound for New York City.

mayhem: violent disorder or chaos

meteors: bright streaks of light in the sky caused by objects entering Earth’s atmosphere from space (Alexander most likely used this word metaphorically)

prodigious: very large or powerful

perpetual: constant

scholarship: money given to a student to pay for their education



3

Coming to America

Alexander, who had been born beside the sea, had definitely been on boats before. After all, he had lived on both Nevis and St. Croix and would have traveled by boat between them. Still, the three-week ocean voyage to Boston would have seemed like an incredible adventure even if the trip had gone smoothly. But partway through the voyage, the ship caught fire, possibly struck by lightning. It took almost a full day to put the fire out with seawater.

The damaged ship managed to make it to Boston, where Alexander disembarked. Alexander had brought letters of introduction with him, written by Reverend Knox. In those days, it was considered polite to wait to be introduced to people before speaking to them. Alexander could present these letters to introduce himself to people, just as if Reverend Knox himself were introducing him in person.

With his luggage and his letters, Alexander traveled to New York City. New York was much larger than St. Croix. There were twenty-five thousand residents. Fourteen different languages were spoken. And it was much colder.

disembarked: left a ship and went ashore

Alexander had never had winter clothes because St. Croix was in a warm climate, but in New York City, he would need warm things. It was a big change, but Alexander embraced it.

Alexander's scholarship money was being held at the firm of Kortright and Company. When he went to get his money, he met a man named Hercules Mulligan, an Irish immigrant whose brother was a partner in the firm. Alexander and Hercules quickly became good friends.

Hercules Mulligan

Hercules Mulligan, an Irish immigrant, was one of Alexander's first friends in New York. Alexander even lived with him and his family while attending King's College. The Mulligan family enjoyed the funny poems Alexander would compose in the evenings for their entertainment.

Hercules was active in the New York chapter of the Sons of Liberty, a group of people who were involved in working for American independence. During the Revolutionary War, Hercules acted as a spy. In fact, he saved George Washington's life on several occasions when he reported plots against him.

Before the war, Hercules, who worked as a haberdasher and tailor, enslaved a man named Cato Howe, who worked with him as a courier and a spy. In 1778, in the midst of the war, Cato was freed in exchange for his military service. Later, Hercules became one of the founders of the New York Manumission Society, an organization that worked to free enslaved people.

haberdasher: someone who sells men's clothing and accessories

courier: messenger

Alexander made his way to New Jersey. Through reading books, tutoring, and real-life experience, Alexander had learned as much as he could, but he was behind in Latin, Greek, and mathematics. So he enrolled in the Academy of Elizabethtown from winter 1772 to spring 1773 to improve his knowledge.

Once Alexander finished at the academy, he very much wanted to attend the College of New Jersey. After all, his mentor Reverend Knox had also graduated from that school. However, Alexander didn't want to take the usual classes. He wanted to speed up his education and graduate as soon as possible. The college authorities would not allow him to work that fast. They wanted him to proceed at the same pace as the other students. Frustrated, Alexander left New Jersey to return to New York.

In New York, he was accepted into King's College, where his childhood best friend, Edward Stevens, was also a student. Alexander enrolled in the fall of 1773. At college, dressed in the traditional academic cap and gown, he was devoted to his studies, learning mathematics, physics, philosophy, and history, among many other subjects. To study, he woke early and took long walks, repeating his lessons to himself again and again as he wandered.

In Alexander's free time, he liked to spend time with his friend Hercules Mulligan. At school, he, Edward, and some other friends formed a club where they could practice writing, speaking, and political expression.

In New Jersey, most of Alexander's friends had wanted the American colonies to be free of British control. But King's College was run by people who were loyal to the British king. Alexander heard many arguments and discussions and soon began developing his own ideas. He came to believe strongly in the cause for American independence.

The Boston Tea Party

The French and Indian War had left Britain with a large debt. The British government thought the colonists should help reduce that debt, so it imposed a series of taxes on the colonies. All of the taxes were unpopular, but the tax on tea made people especially angry.

On December 16, 1773, a group of men, organized by a revolutionary group called the Sons of Liberty, illegally boarded three docked ships to protest the British tax on tea. They threw all the tea they could find into Boston Harbor. This cost the importers a lot of money—more than \$2 million in today's money!

Many people saw the Tea Party as a legitimate protest against the way the colonies were being treated. The impact of the Tea Party added strength to the arguments that the American colonies should be independent of Great Britain. But the British government was angry and believed that there should be retribution for the crime, so it closed Boston Harbor. This escalated tensions even more.

Within two years, war would break out.

legitimate: lawful or valid

escalated: increased

During his first year of college, the famous incident called the Boston Tea Party happened. Alexander wasn't part of that protest because he didn't live in Massachusetts. Plus, he was too busy studying. But the conflict between the colonists and the British government got worse and worse, and Alexander started writing essays about it. He wrote essays arguing that colonists should boycott British goods. He wrote essays arguing with well-known Loyalists. His essays were published anonymously, without his name attached. He signed them "A Friend to America." Some people wondered if Alexander was the author, but the author was so smart, well-read, and thoughtful that people doubted it could be a nineteen-year-old. But it was Alexander. He even gave speeches at the liberty pole in the New York Common, a place where many colonists gathered to hear rousing speeches in favor of independence.

Alexander had begun to believe, along with many other people, that boycotts weren't enough. The colonists would have to fight Britain for their rights.

boycott: refuse to buy



4

College and the Beginning of the War

Alexander understood that he was disadvantaged by his family history. Even with the support of his friends, it would be difficult for him to succeed because at that time, a person's family connections, reputation, and money often decided their fate. Alexander had long believed that becoming a good soldier might help him overcome his family's social status.

In April 1775, the news reached New York that fighting had broken out in Massachusetts. Alexander became even more passionate about working for American independence. Along with his classmates, he began drilling each morning before classes. The young men called themselves the Hearts of Oak. They learned about weapons and battle maneuvers. They wore green jackets and leather caps with the motto "Liberty or Death" embroidered on them.

drilling: performing military exercises

battle maneuvers: military strategies used in combat

Even though Alexander had dreamed that being a soldier could help him make his way in the world, he was more interested in being an honorable man. When King's College president Myles Cooper, who supported the British, was under attack at his home, Alexander distracted the crowd to give Cooper a chance to escape. Alexander didn't agree with Cooper, but he did not want Cooper to be hurt.

In August 1775, King George III proclaimed that the American colonies were in rebellion. That same night, the British ship *Asia* was anchored in New York Harbor. There were two dozen cannons at an abandoned British fort on the south side of Manhattan, and the Americans were worried that the British might try to claim them. So Alexander, Hercules, and other Hearts of Oak members from King's College joined in a raid by a Continental Army company to move the cannons to the liberty pole on the Common. It was hard work. Each cannon weighed one ton. They rescued ten of the cannons before the sailors on the *Asia* began firing at them. With the help of Hamilton and his friends, the company saved all but three of the cannons.



The Revolutionary War

The Revolutionary War was fought between the British, who ruled their North American colonies from across the Atlantic Ocean, and the American colonists, who wished to govern their own country.

Tension grew in the years leading up to the war. In particular, the colonists didn't like the fact that they had no representatives in the British parliament, but Parliament made many rules and laws that affected the colonists. The colonists wanted to have a voice.

In April 1775, the fighting began at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. In the aftermath of these battles, thousands of volunteers banded together as the Continental Army, led by George Washington, to fight the British Army. They were no longer loyal to King George; they were revolutionaries!

In July 1776, the Continental Congress, a group of representatives from each of the thirteen colonies, adopted the Declaration of Independence, formally separating from Great Britain. But the fighting continued for years, finally starting to die down with the British surrender at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, though skirmishes would continue until the end of 1782.

In a letter to his friend Reverend Knox back in St. Croix, Alexander wrote, “My reason and conscience tell me it is impossible to die in a better or more important cause.”

Even though he was at most twenty years old, Alexander was a good soldier. Several generals wanted him to work for them as their aides. But Alexander wanted to fight. He turned them down and continued studying artillery until he was knowledgeable enough to be named captain of the New York Provincial Company of Artillery in March 1776. He made sure his sixty-eight soldiers had good uniforms and equipment. He was very strict, but he turned his company into a solid fighting unit.

Alexander did his duty and always followed orders. That July, the Continental Congress declared independence from Great Britain and approved the Declaration of Independence. But that did not stop the fighting. Instead, the battles intensified. A week later, the British attacked New York, using two of their ships

skirmishes: minor battles

artillery: large guns, such as cannons

to fire on the city. Hamilton was in charge of artillery at Fort George. One of his cannons exploded, killing six of his men. It was not Alexander's fault, but he felt terrible about the loss.

Alexander's good work made his name known among the higher ranks of officers. In January 1777, General George Washington invited Hamilton to join his staff as an aide-de-camp, or assistant. Alexander wanted to keep fighting, but he had been ill, so he decided that working at Washington's side would be a good way to help while he recovered.

George Washington

George Washington is often called "the father of our country." He was the commander in chief of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, and he was the first president of the United States.

Alexander had a long, important relationship with George Washington, beginning during the war and continuing through Washington's terms as president.

It is fair to say that the mutual respect and admiration between Alexander and Washington had a great impact not only on their own lives but also on the beginnings of the new nation.

George Washington was not a gifted writer, and he needed people like Alexander to write letters for him. Sometimes Alexander wrote as many as a hundred letters

a day. Alexander was not George Washington's only assistant, and he became friendly with the other aides-de-camp. They called him Ham or Hammie, and one nicknamed him Little Lion. John Laurens was another of Washington's aides. He and Alexander became very good friends.

John Laurens

John Laurens was a young man from South Carolina who was eager to fight the British. His father arranged for him to become an aide-de-camp to General Washington, the same position Alexander held. He and Alexander became the best of friends, bonding over not only their belief in American independence but also their desire to abolish slavery. Their responsibilities meant that they were not always stationed together during the war, but they wrote letters back and forth. Hamilton was brokenhearted when Laurens died in battle in 1782. Laurens was one of the last casualties of the war.

With General Washington, Alexander was present at many major battles. On September 11, 1777, he was at the Battle of Brandywine on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Washington's troops were defeated, which meant that the British Army might easily be able to take Philadelphia. Washington sent Alexander and some other men to destroy flour mills along the road so that the British would not be able to capture them and use them to feed their armies. But the British fired upon them, and Alexander had to dive into the river to escape

the shots. People thought that Alexander had drowned. His colleagues were sad about this—until he showed up, wet but alive!

Believing that the British were about to take Philadelphia, Alexander sent a message warning the colonial government to evacuate, but the British did not approach Philadelphia as quickly as was expected. Washington took advantage of the break in fighting to have Alexander requisition supplies from Philadelphia residents. The army was in dire need of blankets, clothing, and horses.

Asking people to give up their property for the benefit of the troops was hard work. It required Alexander to be polite and thoughtful. His experience as a clerk in St. Croix had taught him the recordkeeping skills he needed. He was careful to record everything taken for the army and give people receipts so that they could eventually be paid back for what they gave. Alexander didn't know it, but this task was laying the groundwork for his future!

evacuate: remove people from a place of danger

dire: extreme or desperate

5

Seasons of Love and War

Being General Washington's aide-de-camp meant that Alexander was informed of almost all important activities of the war. War was a serious business, and the details of fighting kept Washington and his assistants very busy.

Most of the letters Alexander wrote for General Washington were very serious. But one of Alexander's letters told an interesting story. During the Battle of Germantown on October 4, 1777, a great fog blanketed the battlefield. In the confusion, a fox terrier was separated from its owner. The dog ended up in the American camp, where General Washington inspected her collar and discovered that her name was Lila. He also discovered her owner's name: British general William Howe. Lila belonged to the enemy! General Washington instructed Alexander to write a letter: "General Washington's compliments to General Howe, does himself the pleasure to return him a Dog, which accidentally fell into his hands, and by the inscription on the Collar, appears to belong to General Howe." General Howe may have been

the enemy, but Lila wasn't—it was only fair to send her home.

Later that month, General Washington needed more troops. He sent Alexander to Albany, New York, to convince other generals to send more brigades to help Washington's forces. One of the generals, General Horatio Gates, didn't want to give up his best soldiers, so he offered to send his least able brigade. Alexander was furious. General Gates was upset, too. He didn't want to deal with a young person like Alexander. But finally Gates agreed to send two brigades to Washington.

While Alexander was in Albany, he met up with a college friend. They received an invitation to dine at the home of General Philip Schuyler, a well-known military leader. Philip Schuyler and his wife had a large family. At dinner, Alexander was introduced to the Schuylers' daughter Elizabeth. She was intelligent and educated, and Alexander thought she was very pretty as well. It was an enjoyable meal in the midst of a difficult mission.

The stress of having to travel so quickly took its toll on Alexander's health. In November, Alexander became extremely ill with a fever. In fact, at one point, the doctors thought he would not survive more than a few days. But Alexander rallied and was able to join

brigades: large bodies of troops

General Washington and the army at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, where they had settled in for the winter.

The winter spent at Valley Forge was the most brutal part of the revolution. The soldiers were ill, cold, and hungry. Many men and horses alike died of starvation, disease, or exposure. Alexander, still recovering from his illness, was very unhappy. But slowly he pushed through, spending much of his spare time studying. He dedicated himself to reading everything he could. It made the winter at Valley Forge bearable.

Alexander's Studies

Alexander wanted to understand finance and economics, so he spent much of his spare time reading books and essays on these subjects. The American financial system was weak, partly because of the war and partly because no one had confidence in its monetary system. Alexander learned about the history of the Dutch Republic, which had grown wealthy after the city of Amsterdam established a public bank. Likewise, when Great Britain established the national Bank of England, again the acquisition of wealth followed. Everything Alexander learned would one day help him with the finances of the new United States of America.

For the next three years, Alexander continued to serve General Washington. In the winter of 1779–80, General Washington's troops were stationed in Morristown, New

exposure: lack of protection from severe weather

monetary system: how a country's money is created, used, and controlled

acquisition: the act of gaining something

Jersey. It was another dreadfully cold winter, with more than twenty-eight snowstorms, and General Washington felt as much despair as he had felt during the winter at Valley Forge. But for Alexander, life began to look up.

During that winter, Alexander and his comrades were invited to many social occasions, with dinner, dancing, and conversation. He enjoyed meeting many young ladies. While in Morristown, he became reacquainted with someone he had met two years before—Elizabeth Schuyler, who was often called Eliza. Once he and Eliza started to get to know each other, Alexander lost interest in other women.

Eliza was visiting her aunt about a quarter mile from headquarters. Alexander called on Eliza most evenings. She was everything Alexander had ever hoped for in a wife. She was beautiful and intelligent. Alexander wrote of her, “She is so strange a creature that she possesses all the beauties virtues and graces of her sex without any of those amiable defects.”

Her father was an important man in society and a general in the Continental Army. For Alexander, whose own childhood in St. Croix society had been a time of embarrassment, being accepted by a family like the Schuylers gave him confidence.

defects: flaws

By the spring of 1780, Alexander had made up his mind. He wrote to Eliza's parents to ask them for permission to marry her. On April 8, General Schuyler responded with his and his wife's blessing. Alexander was ecstatic! Even better, General Schuyler was coming to Morristown on war business, and he and his family decided to temporarily rent a house there. Alexander spent many blissful evenings with Eliza and her family before General Washington and his army left the area in June, taking Alexander with them.

For the next few months, Alexander and Eliza were often separated because Alexander had to travel. They kept in touch by writing many, many letters. He even wrote her love poems!

Finally, they were married on December 14, 1780, in the parlor of the Schuyler mansion in Albany, New York. Despite the surrounding blanket of snow, the sun shone through the windows. After a brief honeymoon, Alexander returned to his military duties at Washington's headquarters. Eliza joined him there so they could begin their married life.

ecstatic: extremely happy

parlor: a room used for entertaining guests



6

Alexander Gets His Wish!

Throughout the war, Alexander and General Washington had always had a good working relationship. In fact, General Washington spoke of his aides-de-camp as his family. But in February 1781, Alexander and General Washington had a falling-out.

One day, Alexander needed to deliver a letter. General Washington asked him to stop and talk. Alexander said he would be right back, but it took him longer to deliver the letter than he anticipated. By the time he returned, General Washington was very angry. He said to Alexander, “Colonel Hamilton, you have kept me waiting at the head of the stairs these ten minutes. I must tell you, sir, you treat me with disrespect.”

Washington’s words enraged Alexander. First of all, he thought he had only been gone a couple of minutes, and second, Alexander thought of himself as a man of honor who would never disrespect the general. If General Washington didn’t think of Alexander as a man of honor, Alexander no longer wanted to work for him.

Alexander soon resigned his post as Washington’s aide-de-camp. He worked for a few more weeks while the

resigned: quit a job or other position

general found a replacement, and then he left for Albany with Eliza. But Alexander continued to write letters to General Washington asking for another position. He still had dreams of leading a group of soldiers into battle. In the end, General Washington answered his request, and on July 31, Alexander took command of a light infantry battalion from New York.

By the end of September, Alexander had followed orders to take his battalion south to Virginia, toward Yorktown, where the British commander General Charles Cornwallis had stationed his armies of nine thousand troops. Alexander's friends John Laurens and the Marquis de Lafayette also traveled to Yorktown. For fifteen days, Alexander and his soldiers marched two hundred miles south to the Chesapeake Bay. There, they boarded a ship to sail south to Williamsburg, just northwest of Yorktown, where American forces were preparing to confront Cornwallis.

Marquis de Lafayette

Gilbert du Motier, most often known as the Marquis de Lafayette or just Lafayette, was a young French aristocrat and soldier who traveled to the American colonies to help with the revolution. He was a brilliant military officer. He and Alexander first met in 1777 and quickly became good friends. Lafayette had wealthy connections in France and helped convince the French to support the revolution with both money and troops.

light infantry battalion: a unit of soldiers with less equipment and greater mobility

aristocrat: someone of high social status

General Cornwallis believed his location was a safe place for an encampment. But the French navy, which was helping the American cause, was sailing toward him. Soon, Cornwallis was surrounded on all sides by the Americans and their French allies. It would be almost impossible to keep his British army safe.

Over the next couple of weeks, Alexander worked to prepare his troops. They built fortifications using dirt and tree branches to protect themselves. They also drilled in military fashion, similar to the way Alexander had first drilled in New York with the Hearts of Oak.

The night of October 14, 1781, was moonless and dark. Alexander's soldiers were ready for action. Alexander had asked permission to lead the attack on a part of the British fortification called Redoubt 10. Washington agreed.

It was hard for the British to see in the dark, but they could still hear any noises the soldiers made, so Alexander ordered his troops to be as quiet as possible. They took ammunition out of their guns in case a weapon was discharged by accident. But it was impossible to be completely quiet. The British soon began firing their weapons. Alexander's men forged ahead anyway.

allies: people or groups that provide support for a shared goal
fortifications: structures built to provide defense

They had to bring ladders with them so that they could climb the redoubt. They quickly captured both the redoubt and seventy British soldiers. Other battalions attacked different parts of the British fort. Within minutes, the American army had taken over.



The Battle of Yorktown was a decisive victory for the Americans. Within a few days, General Cornwallis surrendered. The fighting was almost completely over, and Alexander had become the military hero he had always wanted to be. As the Revolutionary War came to a close, it was time for the Americans to build their own country, just as they had imagined. And it was time for Alexander to return to his family.

Alexander rode so swiftly home to Eliza that his horses became exhausted. He had to trade them out for new ones. And Alexander himself became ill. But he could not wait to see his wife. For one thing, his love for her was passionate and unwavering. But for another, Eliza was expecting a baby. He could not wait to become a father. And on January 22, 1782, little Philip Hamilton was born.

The Founding Fathers

“The Founding Fathers” is a term used to describe the men who worked to unite the thirteen colonies to fight against the British during the Revolutionary War and then to create the new United States of America.

Different historians include different men in the list of Founding Fathers, but almost everyone includes George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton.

Were there Founding Mothers? There were absolutely women who wanted liberty for the United States and supported its founding. But in the late eighteenth century, most women did not have the political power to do the kind of work that the Founding Fathers did. Serving in Congress, writing and publishing essays, and fighting in the war were all jobs for men. Still, there were many women who worked on behalf of the new country. In fact, some women disguised themselves as men in order to fight in the Revolutionary War.

Similarly, all of the Founding Fathers were white. At the time, people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and races didn't have any political power. That didn't stop Black men who supported the cause of the revolution. Black men like Prince Dunsick, Salem Poor, and Stacey Williams, as well as many others, enlisted in the army and fought bravely.

7

Just Getting Started

Philip's birth made Alexander and Eliza very happy. Alexander hadn't really known his father, and he did not want that to happen to Philip. Although he was busy studying to become a lawyer, he was also an involved father. "I have been employed for the last ten months in rocking the cradle," Alexander wrote to his friend Lafayette. Because of the disruptions caused by the war, the state of New York temporarily allowed



future lawyers who had served in the army to take the bar exam without first clerking for a lawyer for three years, as was the requirement before the war. Alexander took advantage of this rule change and soon became a practicing lawyer. Through this career, Alexander hoped to provide a good life for his family.

Family Life in New York

Alexander was a man of incredible energy. But he did more than work. In New York City, the Hamilton family lived at 57 Wall Street, in a beautiful neighborhood with three-story brick houses. Over the years, Alexander and Eliza had eight children: Philip, Angelica, Alexander, James, John, William, Eliza, and finally, another Philip. Family life kept them busy. Alexander and Eliza enjoyed attending and hosting dinner parties. They also often went to the theater.

While he worked as a lawyer, he also began working on behalf of the new country he had fought for on the battlefield. The years after the war were sometimes turbulent and confusing. It would take the efforts of many people to bring stability to the new country. Alexander wanted to be one of them.

In July 1782, he was made a continental tax receiver for the state of New York. It was his job to collect the taxes that the state owed the federal government. But houses and businesses in New York City had been damaged

bar exam: a test that someone must pass in order to become a lawyer
clerking: working as an assistant
turbulent: disturbed or violent

during the war, and few people had money to pay taxes. Frustrated, Alexander resigned after just four months.

That November, Alexander attended Congress in Philadelphia as an elected representative. In Philadelphia, one of the most important tasks facing the new Congress was to pay the country's bills. It had cost money to win the war. If the country didn't pay its debts, it would look very bad to the rest of the world. Alexander wanted to raise money through taxes, even though his experience as a tax receiver showed him how hard that would be. Alexander was also worried about the money owed to the army. What kind of a country would the United States be if it couldn't even pay its own soldiers? For these reasons and others, Alexander and many of his colleagues believed that the country needed a strong federal government.

Congress

Around the time of the American Revolution and afterward, several congresses were convened (brought together) to handle the affairs of government. The First Continental Congress met in 1774. Its purpose was to bring together representatives to figure out how to react to the British laws that were upsetting the colonists. The Second Continental Congress met between 1775 and 1781. This was the Congress that wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence and acted as the federal government during the war. What is now called the Congress of the Confederation began in 1781, after the war was won. This is the Congress to which Alexander was elected as a delegate from the state of New York.

While Alexander was serving in Congress, his law practice grew in an unexpected way. During the war, some states, including New York, passed laws allowing the seizure of the property belonging to those who remained loyal to England. After the war, some Loyalists sued in order to reclaim their seized property. Alexander agreed to represent them in court.

Even though Alexander was a Patriot, he didn't agree with punishing Loyalists just because of their political beliefs. He thought that the former Loyalists and the Patriots needed to work together to build the new country. He went to court at least sixty-five times to support Loyalists. Some people disagreed with Alexander's point of view, but they admired his skill as a lawyer.

Other Postwar Accomplishments

The founding of the Bank of New York: *In 1784, Alexander's brother-in-law wanted to invest some of his fortune. He asked Alexander for help. Alexander and some others met at a coffeehouse to create a new bank where people could invest their money. Alexander wrote a constitution (a set of rules and practices) for the new bank. It was such a good constitution that many banks used it as a model in the coming years.*

The New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves: *From a young age, Alexander was aware of slavery. His grandfather, in addition to owning a small plantation where enslaved people worked against their will, was a physician*

who inspected enslaved people in the marketplace. As a boy, an enslaved person named Ajax helped care for Alexander. His mother, Rachel, “owned” five adult enslaved people and their four children, including Ajax. Sometimes Rachel earned extra money by renting these enslaved people to other people.

But even though Alexander grew up with the institution of slavery, he hated it. By the time of the Revolutionary War, Alexander was actively working on a plan to allow Black people to fight for the American colonies, with freedom as a reward after the war. In 1785, he was one of the thirty-one founding members of the New York Manumission Society, an abolitionist group.

Alexander continued working in politics. In 1786, he was elected to the New York legislature. That September, he went to the Annapolis Convention. The delegates at Annapolis wanted to create new rules about how states could trade goods. But when they started discussing how to reform trade systems, they realized there were bigger problems with the federal government that needed to be addressed, not just rules for interstate trade. Alexander drafted a document asking for a constitutional convention in Philadelphia.

In May 1787, the Constitutional Convention came to Philadelphia to discuss reforming the federal government. Alexander was one of three delegates sent by New York State. On June 18, Alexander gave a six-hour speech to

abolitionist: a person who fights to end slavery
legislature: a group of people that makes laws

explain his ideas, but he became frustrated when people didn't agree with him. He decided to return to New York City to be with his family. But there was still important work to be done, so he composed himself and, two months later, returned to the convention.



The delegates worked all summer to create a new system of government, which they described in a new constitution. The delegates, including Alexander, voted to approve the document. Then the Constitution had to be sent to the states. Nine of the thirteen states had to ratify, or approve, the Constitution in order for it to take effect.

Alexander agreed with the changes to the new constitution, but not everyone would be easily convinced. In order to persuade legislators in New York State to

ratify it, he and his colleagues set out to write a series of essays—eighty-five in total. Alexander wrote fifty-one of the essays, and James Madison and John Jay wrote the rest. All eighty-five essays, known today as the *Federalist Papers*, were published under a pen name, Publius, in several different newspapers. And on July 26, 1788, New York became the eleventh state to ratify the Constitution. The Constitution would be the law of the land.

It was a new beginning for the country. And like the new country, Alexander was just getting started!

The United States Constitution

The United States Constitution organizes the way the country's government is run. The federal government and state governments both can make laws, but they have different responsibilities. For example, only the federal government can make money, declare war, and conduct foreign affairs. State governments make laws that affect only their own states. Among other things, state governments control the schools, traffic laws, and sales tax in their own states.

The Constitution divides the federal government into three branches. The legislative branch, called Congress, makes laws. Congress consists of two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The executive branch, headed by the president, enforces laws and provides the day-to-day running of government departments. The judicial branch evaluates

pen name: a false name used by an author

foreign affairs: matters involving relationships with other countries

sales tax: a tax on sales of goods and services, collected by the seller on behalf of the government

the laws and makes sure they are constitutional. In addition, a system of checks and balances ensures that no branch can become too powerful.

The Constitution is the most important legal document in the United States. All other laws must comply with it. Sometimes people want a part of the Constitution to be changed. Such a change is called an amendment. It is a big deal to pass an amendment. First, the amendment has to be passed by a two-thirds majority in each house of Congress, and then it has to be ratified by three-quarters of the states. There have been twenty-seven amendments to the Constitution. The first ten are often grouped together and called the Bill of Rights. Amendments don't happen very often. The most recent amendment, the twenty-seventh, was ratified in 1992!

8

Secretary Hamilton

In early 1789, the new country held its first presidential election. George Washington, the hero of the Revolutionary War, was unanimously chosen by the Electoral College.

The new nation's most pressing problem was its financial security. The country was in deep debt after the war, and no one could agree on what money to use, how to use it, or who should be in charge of it. Some people in Congress thought that the finances should be handled by a committee, but President Washington believed there was only one man for the job: a man who had been bookkeeping since he was a child. On September 11, 1789, he nominated Alexander to the new position of secretary of the treasury. Alexander was approved by Congress, and Eliza and the children joined him in Philadelphia, where they rented a large brick house at 79 South Third Street.

Electoral College: a group of delegates, or representatives, chosen by each state in accordance with the Constitution

Alexander quickly began his work. First, the foreign countries that had loaned the Patriots money to pay for supplies, weapons, and soldiers during the Revolutionary War needed to be repaid. To do this, Alexander wanted to borrow money from the public by selling bonds. Other people, like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, disagreed. They didn't want to give the federal government so much power, and they wanted the states to pay their own debts. But Alexander came up with a plan.

Federalists and Anti-Federalists

Not everyone agreed with Alexander's actions, even when they were approved by Congress and signed into law by President Washington. Alexander was a Federalist, meaning he wanted a strong federal government. The main opposition to the Federalists was the Anti-Federalists, who wanted more power for the states. Over time, the Anti-Federalists, led by Thomas Jefferson, became known as the Democratic-Republicans.

In June 1790, Alexander met with James Madison and Thomas Jefferson at Jefferson's house in New York City to propose a deal. Alexander wanted to pay off the debts owed not only by the federal government but also by the state governments. Then the government would sell a type of investment called bonds, which would rebuild the money in the treasury. The American people would be encouraged to invest in their country's future.

In exchange, a new, permanent federal capital city

would be built on the banks of the Potomac River, on land taken from Maryland and Virginia. Because many southerners wanted the capital to be more centrally located, Jefferson and Madison accepted the deal and agreed to get their colleagues in Congress to vote for it. The capital would be moved, and the United States would take on the debts of the states. This famous deal became known as the “dinner table bargain.”



For the next few years, Alexander continued to come up with new ideas to strengthen the country’s finances. He convinced Congress to create a national bank. He established a national mint and instituted the country’s first common currency. When shipping companies tried

national mint: a government facility that creates a country’s money

common currency: a system of money shared by different states or countries

to avoid taxes by smuggling in goods, he launched a fleet of ships called the Revenue Marine Service to chase the smugglers.

The constant political battles began to wear Alexander down. He was tired, and he missed spending time with his wife and family. In early 1795, Alexander resigned as secretary of the treasury. He and his family left Philadelphia and returned to New York City, where he took up the practice of law again.

Blackmail!

In 1791 and 1792, during the time when Alexander was secretary of the treasury, he did something he was very ashamed of. Two people who knew what he had done told him that unless he gave them a lot of money, they would tell Eliza about his behavior. This is called blackmail. If he wanted to continue to be a respected leader, he had to keep his actions a secret, so he paid money to the blackmailers. Years later, in 1797, some of his political enemies found out what had happened and threatened to make the story public. He admitted his wrongdoing, much to his enemies' glee. He lost many people's respect, but he still continued to work hard for his country, just not as an elected official.

Alexander continued to serve his country in other ways. He remained an adviser to George Washington and helped him write his farewell address when Washington finished his presidency in 1797. He became the senior

smugglers: people who illegally import or export goods

officer in charge of the army when the United States was on the brink of war with France. He worked behind the scenes to influence the presidential elections of 1796 and 1800, writing letters to his friends to encourage them to vote for his favorite candidates. Alexander's influence was wide-ranging. What a remarkable ascent he made from his boyhood poverty to his life as a Founding Father!

9

The Price of Fame

The presidential election of 1796 didn't go the way Alexander hoped. Even though the winner, John Adams, had been vice president to George Washington for eight years and was a member of the same Federalist Party as Alexander, Alexander and Adams didn't like each other, nor did they trust one other.

In 1800, it was time for Adams to run for reelection. Unfortunately for Adams, Alexander was holding a grudge. Adams had once made fun of Alexander's humble birth, calling him rude names. In response, Alexander wrote a pamphlet arguing against Adams's reelection. The pamphlet was not supposed to be public, but Aaron Burr, who was also running for president, found out about it and shared it with everyone. Adams lost badly to two Democratic-Republicans, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, who tied.

pamphlet: a short, printed publication without a hard cover

Having a tie in the Electoral College meant that the House of Representatives would have to vote. Many people wanted to vote for Burr, but Alexander threw his support behind Jefferson. Alexander didn't agree with Jefferson or Burr politically, but in his opinion, Jefferson was honorable, and Aaron Burr was not. People listened to Alexander and voted for Jefferson. Jefferson was elected president, and Burr, as the second-place finisher, became vice president.

Back in New York, Alexander's life centered on his family. He and Eliza were busy raising seven children and building their dream house. His family had always lived in a rented house, but now he decided to build them a permanent home. He built their home in Upper Manhattan on a heavenly plot of wooded land with views of the Hudson River. He named the house the Grange, after the house in Scotland where his father had been born many years before. Even with his focus on his family life, he still cared deeply about his country. In fact, he planted thirteen sweet gum trees in the garden to symbolize the thirteen original states. But while the Grange was being built, something terrible happened.

Alexander and Eliza's oldest son, Philip, was intelligent and handsome. He had graduated from Columbia College and was following in his father's footsteps to become a lawyer. Alexander loved his son very much, and his son loved him in return.

There were always people who disagreed with or disliked Alexander. Most politicians expect that. One person who disliked Alexander was a young man named George Eacker. Eacker gave a speech on July 4, 1801, in which he claimed that Alexander wanted to overthrow the government by force. This simply wasn't true. When Philip ran into Eacker at a theater, Philip spoke up to defend his father's honor, and Eacker called him a rude name. In response, Philip challenged Eacker to a duel. Tragically, Philip lost the duel and died from a fatal gunshot wound.

Alexander, Eliza, and the rest of their children were heartbroken.

Dueling

Dueling was an old-fashioned way for gentlemen to defend their honor. If one man felt insulted, he could challenge his opponent to a duel.

During the duel, the two men, armed with guns, would walk away from each other, then turn and shoot. Sometimes, the duelists would shoot into the air because being brave enough to show up was honorable in itself. But sometimes the duelists did shoot at each other and could be badly injured or killed.

Some men continued dueling through the time of the Civil War (1861–65), but duels became rare as people came to believe that dueling was unnecessary violence. By the beginning of the twentieth century, duels were outlawed almost everywhere in the United States and Europe. Ideally, we can solve problems and work out our issues through conversation and compromise.

Over the next few years, Alexander and Eliza continued to grieve Philip. It took Alexander months to respond to letters. His friend Robert Troup said Alexander's face was now "strongly stamped with grief." Alexander's mood remained gloomy. He had never been very religious, but he seemed to find some comfort in going to church. Slowly, he returned to his political writing, and some of that focused on Vice President Aaron Burr.

Alexander had known Aaron Burr for many years. He and Burr ran in the same social circles and often dined or attended parties together. But Alexander didn't think Burr was a man of honor, and he said so openly.

In the summer of 1804, Aaron Burr accused Alexander of making insulting comments about him. Alexander and Burr exchanged several angry letters back and forth until finally, Aaron Burr challenged Alexander to a duel.

A Lifelong Rivalry

Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton had many things in common. They were both orphaned as young people. They both wanted to be educated and successful. They both enjoyed writing and debating. They both enlisted in the Continental Army and fought heroically. And they both became lawyers and politicians in the new nation.

But although they were both devoted to the United States, they had different political beliefs. Their many intellectual skirmishes throughout their lives helped lead to their climactic duel.

On July 11, early in the morning, the two men rode in rowboats across the river from New York City to Weehawken, New Jersey. When the duel began, they walked slowly away from each other with their guns in hand, then turned and fired. Alexander shot his gun into the air so that no one would be hurt. But Aaron shot Alexander in the abdomen. Even though a doctor was immediately able to tend to him, Alexander died the next day. In his last hours, he said that he forgave Burr.



Alexander's funeral was held on July 14, 1804. Thousands of people lined the streets of New York City to view the funeral procession, which was so full of mourners that it lasted two hours. Alexander was buried in the Trinity Church cemetery with full military honors. Of course, Alexander's death left Eliza and her children heartbroken once again, but the entire country also mourned. In fact, many New Yorkers wore black mourning bands around their upper arms for thirty days.

Most of the Founding Fathers lived to be quite old, but Alexander was only in his late forties. Yet in his relatively short life, he made huge contributions—first to the thirteen colonies in their pursuit of independence from the British, and then to the new United States of America and its systems of law, banking, and public administration. Today, we remember him in countless ways, from his portrait on the ten-dollar bill to a Broadway musical. And it would be a big task to list all the schools, buildings, towns, cities, and military ships named in his honor. Through his patriotism, intelligence, work ethic, and courage, Alexander Hamilton, who rose from poverty to prominence, earned his place as a true American hero and one of the greatest Americans of his time.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about Alexander's childhood in the Caribbean. How was it similar to your life? How was it different?
2. What did Alexander learn as a child and teenager that helped him as an adult?
3. If you had to move to a new country without your family, what would be the hardest part? What skills or traits do you have that would help you succeed?
4. Why was it so important to Alexander to become a soldier and fight in a war?
5. How did Alexander become passionate about the fight for American independence?
6. What were Alexander's most important contributions to the American cause during the war?
7. Explain Alexander's argument with General Washington. Which of the two men was justified in his feelings? Does this argument make sense to you?
8. What personal qualities did Alexander have that allowed him to succeed in the world? Why did some people dislike him?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. What did it mean to Alexander to be a man of honor?
What does being a person of honor mean to you?
10. If you could ask Alexander any question, what would it be?

Meet the Author



Anne Marie Pace has loved to read and write since she was old enough to turn the pages of a book and hold a pencil. The first story she remembers writing was about a child who was sledding on a winter day and couldn't get his sled to slow down. He caused all sorts of trouble, including sledding right through his mom's kitchen! Anne Marie also loved writing stories about families with ten or twelve children. She loved her only sister, but she thought it would be fun to live in a house with lots going on.

Anne Marie has lived in Virginia all her life. She studied English and history in college and then learned to be a teacher in graduate school. She was a teacher before she was a professional writer, and now she loves to help other writers improve their stories. She also loves visiting schools to share her books.

Anne Marie has written lots of picture books and has published eleven of them, including *Groundhug Day*, *Busy-Eyed Day*, *Sunny's Tow Truck Saves the Day!*, *Mouse Calls*, and the four books of the *Vampirina Ballerina* series. She loves to bake cookies and cakes for her four children and her husband. (Her two dogs and three cats do not get any cake.)

Meet the Illustrator



Christopher Thornock is an illustrator, artist, and educator living in the Mountain West with his family, two cats, and a dog named Archie. Drawing is his passion, and he is often found with his nose in a sketchbook. When not making art, he is teaching at a local university or out walking the dog.

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