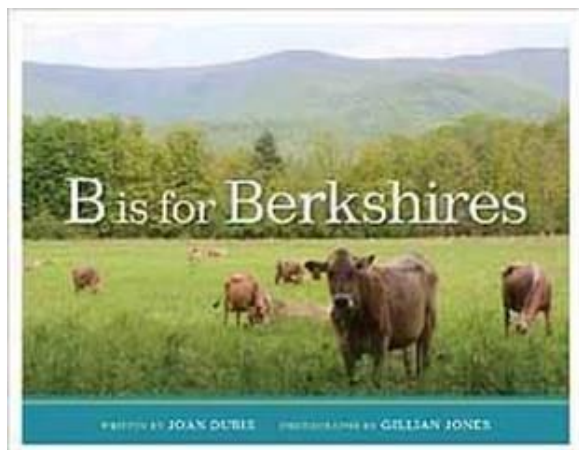# B is for Berkshires

Teacher's Guide

Developed by Joan Duris

32 pages   Ages 3 –10
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Explore the wonders of the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. This nonfiction children's book is filled with playful poems and fun facts about the Berkshires— things you can't find on the internet, and can only learn from primary sources. Discover the natural beauty and cultural richness of this thriving area midway between Boston and New York City.

"An engaging yet succinct source which lends itself to rich mini-lessons about main idea and detail." -Kate Narita, fourth grade teacher, Center School in Stow, MA

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About the Author: Joan Duris

Explore…

Imagine…

Discover…

…the world of books.

An explorer at heart, Joannie Duris enjoys discovering new places tucked away in the corners of New England. Her philosophy: Go slow, so you don't miss the good stuff. She studied geology before moving on to a career in nursing. In the winter, she explores the outdoors while helping skiers and snowshoers as a member of the Northfield Mountain Nordic Ski Patrol. She has had stories and articles published in several national children's magazines, and on BoomWriter, a writing website for kids. She leads a local Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) critique group of fellow writers. *B is for Berkshires* is her first book.

A New England transplant, Joannie spent much of her childhood in Japan. She lives in central Massachusetts with her husband and spoiled cats, where she can occasionally be seen chasing black bears away from her bird feeders. Learn more about Joannie, upcoming events and appearances, and the making of *B is for Berkshires* on her website at www.joanduris.com. You can reach her through her publisher, or by using the Contact Form on her website.

Curriculum Connections

This alphabet book utilizes a multi-layered text that will appeal to readers of a wide range in age and grade level. Throughout this guide you'll find activities to use with both younger children and older readers. Activities can be adjusted to meet the needs of your group. These activities address many Core Standards across the curriculum, as noted in the following chart:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS ELA):

Grade 3
- Key Ideas and Details
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.2
- Craft and Structure
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.4
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.6
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.8
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.7
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.8
- Speaking and Listening
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1.D
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.2
- Writing
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2.B

Grade 4
- Key Ideas and Details
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3
- Craft and Structure
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.8
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.8
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9
- Speaking and Listening
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2
- Writing
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2.D

Common Core Math Standards (CCSS Math):

Grade 4
- Operations and Algebraic Thinking
  CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.OA.A.3
- Measurement and data
  CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.MD.A.1
  CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.MD.A.2

Before You Read...

Multiple intelligences addressed: verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual/spatial, logical.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice about the cover?
2. Based on the cover and the title, what predictions can you make about the book?
   a. Write responses on chart paper, or have students write three predictions in their notebooks.
3. Does anyone know where the Berkshires are?
   a. Show the location on a map, or have students research the location.

Group Activity

Tell students this is an alphabet book about the Berkshires. Using an ABC Organizer, students will explore what they know about the area, and try to imagine and predict what topic the author has selected for each letter. As they read the book, they will discover what topics have been covered.

1. THINK: Using the ABC Organizer (Activity Sheet One) think of a word, activity, or location associated with the Berkshires, matching a topic to each letter of the alphabet.
2. PAIR: Discuss your A to Z topics with a partner. Put a check mark next to any topics that are the same as your partner. Add any topics that your partner had that you don't have.
3. SHARE: Review yours, and your partner's ideas. Circle the one for each letter that you'd like to share with the group.

Create a master ABC Organizer on chart paper. List the topics that partners share with the group.

- Which letters have the most variety of topics?
- Which letters are hard to match with topics?
- Are there any letters without topics?

Save this master list to refer to as you read the book.

As You Read…

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal.

Discussion Questions and Activities

After reading the introduction page, and sharing the photograph on it:

1. What details do you hear that support the main idea of the book?
2. What connection do you see between the text and the photo?
3. How has the author organized the text to make it easier to read?
4. Based on information gathered through the introduction text and photo, are there any new topics the group would like to add to the master ABC Organizer? Add these to the master list.
5. Choose one vocabulary word from the introduction and discuss its meaning, or have students look up the word in a dictionary and write the definition. Discuss other words the students are interested in.

As you read each letter and topic, and study the related photograph:

1. Compare the author's topic and topics listed in the "__ is also for __" sentence for each letter with the master ABC Organizer. Do you have any matches? Circle these matches. Why do you think the author chose her topics?
2. What details do you hear that support the main idea of the book? How does the author show the connection with the Berkshires?
3. What connection do you see between the text and the photo?
4. How has the author used text structure, word choice, and voice to convey the information? Is the text formal or conversational? Give examples of how the author made it that way.
5. TEXT-TO-SELF and TEXT-TO-WORLD connection: Locate on a map the specific towns or attractions noted in the book. Has anyone visited these locations, or done any of the specific activities mentioned in the text? Has anyone participated in similar activities elsewhere?
6. Chose one vocabulary word from each letter and topic, and discuss its meaning, or have students look up the word in a dictionary and write the definition. Discuss other words the students are interested in. Create an Interactive Word Wall using all the Berkshires vocabulary words.

After You Read...

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical/mathematical.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Use a graphic organizer to help students summarize and process material covered in the book. Consider using the organizer to help students explore each topic from A to Z while reading:
   a. Topic:_____
   b. What do I already know?
   c. What do I want to Know?
   d. What have I learned?
2. Refer back to the master ABC Organizer. How many matches did students have for topics selected by the author? How many master Organizer topics matched those listed in the "___ is also for ___" sentence for each letter?
3. THINK: Randomly assign one letter to each student by having each child pull a letter out of a box. Ask each student to write a twenty-word summary of the material covered by the author for that topic (shorter for younger students).
4. PAIR: Pair students together with their two, randomly assigned letters. Ask each team to create a Venn diagram with overlapping circles to show the similarities and differences between their letters. Students should compare and contrast page layout and structure, word choice and voice, as well as the topic.
5. SHARE: Ask teams to share their summaries and Venn diagrams with the group.
6. TEXT-TO-TEXT: Compare and contrast *B is for Berkshires* with:
   a. A selection of illustrated ABC concept books from the library.
   b. The two previous alphabet books in the series by Islandport Press: *A is for Acadia* and *C is for Cape Cod*. What differences and similarities do you see? Compare and contrast page layout and structure, word choice and voice, as well as the topics.
7. SECRET BALLOT VOTE: Ask students to write one sentence about their favorite topic/letter in the book. "I liked _____ because _____." Each student is to vote once in a secret ballot box for his/her favorite letter. Assign several students to tally the votes on chart paper. Submit a list of the top five favorites to the publisher: Joan Duris, c/o Islandport Press, P.O. Box 10, Yarmouth, ME 04096. You may also submit your list via the Contact Form on Joannie's website. If you include an e-mail address, she will send an e-mail to your class, including a list of the top letters voted on throughout the country.

Playing with Poems...

Multiple intelligences addressed: verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal.

1. Ask students to write their own A-Z poems for each of the main topics covered in *B is for Berkshires*. Students may continue to work in pairs on the same letters as in previous activities, or they may draw for new letters from the box.
2. Ask students to experiment with different forms of poetry by writing their A-Z poems in haiku, couplets, or free verse.
3. Do these new poems still make a connection with the photo and the main text for that topic? Write one sentence to explain how these connections are still present.
4. Compare and contrast the different versions of poetry for each letter. Do different forms of poetry lend themselves to a more serious or light-hearted approach?

A New Focus on the Berkshires...

Multiple intelligences addressed: verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal.

The author still had many choices to make after the topics for each letter had been selected. Dozens of pages of research, from multiple resources, needed to be edited down to less than 150 words. This involved a process to determine what the best focus for each topic would be. What would make each piece the most interesting? What angle had the best connection to the Berkshires? What focus made the best connection to options available for the photograph? For example, "P is for Pumpkins" could have been about how to grow pumpkins, carve them, cook them, or their history in agriculture. However, the perfect focus seemed obvious when the author discovered that a famous variety of pumpkin had been developed in the southern Berkshires.

1. Students may continue to work in pairs on the same letters as in previous activities, or they may draw for new letters from the box to explore new topics. You may also decide to have the entire class write on the same topic/letter.
2. Ask students to research their topics. Students should use the information they have gathered to write one to three paragraphs with a different focus from how the author covered that topic in the book.
3. Compare and contrast the different versions on each topic. How does a change in focus affect the text structure, word choice, and voice to convey the information? Is the text now formal or conversational?
4. Has a change in focus maintained or lost the connection with the photograph?
5. Has a change in focus maintained or lost the connection with the Berkshires?

Make Your Own *B is for Berkshires* Book...

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal.

1. Have the class draw illustrations or take photographs to cover each topic, then print out and bind together all the above A-Z poem variations. If desired, create separate books for each form of poetry.
2. Have the class draw illustrations or take photographs to cover each topic, then print out and bind together all the above A-Z topics written with a different focus. Note: students may decide to draw illustrations or take photographs that better match the new focus on each topic.
3. Create your own A-Z Berkshires book. Ask students to choose one of the topics in the "__ is also for __" sentence for the letter they are assigned. Create a book of poetry, detailed text, or a combination of both using these new topics.

Make Your Own Alphabet Book from A to Z...

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal.

1. Decide on the focus for your class alphabet book. Use an ABC Organizer to help select topics to be covered. Ask students to create a book of poetry or detailed text, and to draw illustrations or take photographs to cover each topic. Options for the focus of the book can range from animals, plants, objects found at home or at school, or a subject currently being studied in class.

Berkshire Games...

Berkshire Boggle (Activity Sheet Two)
Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal.

Give students ten minutes to create as many words as possible with the letters in "B is for Berkshires." Each of the letters can only be used once for each new word, but note that some letters are found more than once in "B is for Berkshires", so those letters can be used multiple times in a new word. Also ask students to find the words suggested by the clues on the Berkshire Boggle game sheet (answers below). When the time is up:

- Ask students to take turns reading their list of words.
- If another student has the same word, cross it off your list.
- Who had the most words to start?
- Who ended up with the most unique words that nobody else had?
- Who was able to find all the words suggested by the clues?

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For younger students, you may vary the game by asking them to alphabetize their words, or sort them by the number of letters or by word families.

Boggle Word Answers:

1. Fork	4. Bike	7. Fires	10. Fresh fish
2. Hiss	5. Hike	8. Risk	
3. Free	6. Skier	9. Ore	

Berkshires Mystery Bags

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, logical, kinesthetic.

Supplies: ten paper lunch bags, marker, string, stapler, mystery contents.

- Write one letter on each bag, spelling out B-E-R-K-S-H-I-R-E-S.
- Hide one common item in each bag that starts with that letter (suggestions below).
- Seal each bag closed by folding and stapling the top over the string.
- Space the bags, (in order, to spell out Berkshires) two feet or more apart, so that students will be able to study each bag without bumping into each other.
- Hang the string of bags between two chairs so that the bags are within easy reach of all the students.
- Ask students to create a scorecard by writing the letters for Berkshires down the left side of a piece of paper, and drawing a line next to each letter. Students will write down their guesses for each letter on these lines.
- Give students ten minutes to determine the hidden items. As they work down the row of bags, they may use all their senses: shake and listen, feel, smell, and look at each bag—*but they cannot open any bag until after the game is finished.*
- After ten minutes, ask students to share what they think each mystery bag contains. What senses and clues did they use to make their guesses? Make a list of guesses on chart paper. Do some bags have multiple different guesses for the hidden object?
- Open each bag, one at a time, to share what was hidden inside. Which hidden objects were easy to guess? Which hidden objects were harder to determine?

Note: Just as students limited their guesses by what would fit in each bag (no elephant in the "E" bag), the author limited choices for her A-Z letters to topics that would "fit" the Berkshires. She only used words, activities, or locations associated with the Berkshires, and selected topics that she thought readers would find surprising and fun—not the usual "A is for apple" and "B is for ball."

This mystery bag game lends itself to many subjects, seasons, and holidays. Try it with the letters for "Happy Birthday", "Winter Weather" and "History."

Suggestions for Berkshires Mystery Bag Objects:

B: beads, buttons, ball, brush, bottle, bracelet, bow (ribbon), belt.

E: eraser, envelope, earring, egg (plastic).

R: ruler, rings, rock, raisins, radishes, ribbon, robot (toy).

K: keys, knife, knight or king (chess pieces).

S: bar of soap, spoon, scarf, sand (in Ziplock bag), salt shaker, stick.

H: hat, hairband or clips, hair (brush out your pet).

I: inkpad, bottle of ink, icicle (plastic ornament).

R: ruler, rings, rock, raisins, radishes, ribbon, robot (toy).

E: eraser, envelope, earring, egg (plastic).

S: bar of soap, spoon, scarf, sand (in Ziplock bag), salt shaker, stick.

STEM Projects and Activities...

America's National Bird

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, naturalist.

- Have the class watch a bald eagle nest live cam over several days, or watch past recordings. Ask students to write one to three paragraphs based on what they observed. One resource: www.eaglenestcams.com
- Have students work together to research and create an informational brochure about bald eagles.
- Ask students to research and expand on what the author wrote regarding:
    - The causes for the decline and disappearance of bald eagles in the area.
    - Efforts to protect the environment and reintroduce bald eagles to the area.
    - How and when spring nest counts are accomplished in Massachusetts or your own state.

Fiber Animals

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, naturalist, kinesthetic.

- Research and create posters detailing the care and life cycle of animals raised for their fiber. Include fiber qualities and uses. Include domestic uses besides fiber. Research animals found in the Berkshires as well as more unusual

animals: sheep, alpacas, llamas, angora rabbits, angora goats (mohair fiber), cashmere goats, musk ox (qiviut fiber), bison, camel, yak. A good resource for starting research: www.stillrivermill.com (click on the fiber info tab).

- Ask students to research online how to make a simple drop spindle. Experiment with different suggested materials such as a wooden dowel and old CD, or even a potato and pencil, then watch an online video to learn how to use a drop spindle to spin fiber. Have students brush their pets, saving the hair in bags for class. Students should try spinning this collected pet hair, or other purchased animal fibers such as wool, using their drop spindles. What type of spindle is easiest to use? What type of fiber is easiest to spin?

Tunnel Engineering

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, logical/mathematical, kinesthetic.

- SCALE MODEL: Ask students to calculate dimensions, then create scale models of the Hoosac Tunnel (Activity Sheet Three) using the information provided. Included on the activity sheet is a bonus construction project.

Tunnel Engineering/Scale Model Answers:
1. Scale model: Length = 250.31 inches = 20.86 feet. Width: 0.23 inches.
2. Unifix cube model: Length = 1,088.30 cubes = 816.22 inches = 68.02 feet.
3. The two-mile long truck train = 132 cars.

- Research the construction of the Hoosac Tunnel. Why did engineers have difficulty building the tunnel? Divide students into teams of three or four to write a report or give an oral presentation about one of the inventions that overcame these difficulties and led to the completion of the tunnel.
- Ask students to use their imagination to create new techniques for designing and building a tunnel. Where would their tunnel go? What would it connect?

An Upside-down World

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, naturalist, logical/mathematical, kinesthetic.

Ask students to research and study the support structure for the upside-down trees in Natalie Jeremijenko's *Tree Logic* at MASS MoCA in North Adams. What materials are used? Why was the support structure designed this way?

- Have students work in pairs to design a different way to support upside-down plants in your classroom. Consider how to keep soil in the pots, and water off the floor, as well as support needs for weight and height changes as the plants grow.
- Work together to create an upside-down garden in your class. If desired, order pots specifically designed for upside-down growing. One resource:

www.boskke.com (click on the products tab for the Sky Planter). You may also decide to use upside-down tomato planters found at many local stores and garden centers. You'll still need to design a solid support system for these pots.

- Experiment with different types of plants: fast-growing seeds such as sunflowers or beans, common house plants, or vegetables purchased from a local nursery.
- Document and graph the growth patterns of the plants over time. At what point do the plants change growth directions? How does the growth pattern vary with different plants?
- Try flipping your garden to right-side up. How long does it take your plants to adjust to their new lifestyle?

Create Your Own Xeriscape Garden

Multiple intelligences addressed: visual/spatial, interpersonal, naturalist, kinesthetic.

Design a garden that reduces water use. A perfect project for schools, home, and the community. See the separate pdf for instructions and suggestions.

Math and Maps

Multiple intelligences addressed: logical/mathematical, visual/spatial.

COW CALCULATIONS: Get students in the mooo-d for math with Cow Calculations (Activity Sheet Four). Ask students to show their work, and how they solved each problem, including labels for their answers.

Cow Calculations Answers:
1. 10 cows
2. 18 cows by machine; 6 cows by hand
3. 32 pounds of milk
4. 4 ½ gallons (4.5 gallons) of milk; 18 quarts of milk
5. 48 ounces of cheese; BONUS: 1 ¼ gallons (1.25 gallons) of milk

TAKE A HIKE: Print out trail maps for Bartholomew's Cobble for each student: www.thetrustees.org (type Bartholomew's Cobble in the search box; the link for a pdf of the trail map will be the first item listed). Students should use the map to answer word problems while they Take a Hike (Activity Sheet Five).

Take a Hike Answers:
1. 2,640 feet; 880 yards; Housatonic River
2. 0.65 miles; 3,432 feet
3. about 2,000 feet
4. The Spero Trail
5. Bailey Trail is flat. Answers will vary for higher trails.

Activity Sheet One: ABC ORGANIZER
Topic: *Berkshires*

A _____

B _____

C _____

D _____

E _____

F _____

G _____

H _____

I _____

J _____

K _____

L _____

M _____

N _____

O _____

P _____

Q _____

R _____

S _____

T _____

U _____

V _____

W _____

X _____

Y _____

Z _____

Activity Sheet Two: BERKSHIRE BOGGLE

Create as many words as possible with the letters in **"B is for Berkshires."**

- Each of the letters can only be used once for each new word.
- Note that some letters are found more than once in "B is for Berkshires," so those letters can be used multiple times in each new word.
- Which words in your list fit in the blanks for the clues listed below?

1. Something you eat with: ___ ___ ___ ___

2. What a mad cat does: ___ ___ ___ ___

3. If something doesn't cost money, it's: ___ ___ ___ ___

4. What you pedal that has two wheels: ___ ___ ___ ___

5. What you do on a trail: ___ ___ ___ ___

6. Someone who travels across snow: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

7. Smokey the Bear watches out for forest: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

8. To take a chance is to take a: ___ ___ ___ ___

9. Rock taken from a mine: ___ ___ ___

10. What you hope to catch in a lake: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___ ___

Activity Sheet Three: TUNNEL ENGINEERING

Hoosac Tunnel measurements: Length: 23,031 feet. Width at base: 23 feet.

(Tunnel = 4.74 miles. One mile = 5,280 feet = 1,760 yards = 63,360 inches.)

Please show your work, and how you solved each problem. Label your answers.

1. SCALE MODEL: Using a scale of 1 inch = 100 feet, create a paper model of the Hoosac Tunnel, showing the tunnel's length and width as a strip of paper. In inches, how long will the strip of paper be? How many feet is that? How wide, in inches, will your paper model be?
   Answers:

   _____
   _____
   _____

   Work with your classmates to measure, cut, and tape this model together.
   If needed, move the completed model outside to unroll the entire length.

2. CUBE MODEL: Use ¾ inch, square Unifix cubes to build your model of the Hoosac Tunnel. Use a scale of 1 cube = 23 feet (base width of the tunnel). How many cubes would you need to model the length of the tunnel? How many inches is that? How many feet?
   Answers:

   _____
   _____
   _____

   Measure this length outside in the school playground. Have half the class stand
   at each end of what would be your Unifix cube model (if you had enough cubes!).

3. TRUCK TRAINS: A two-mile long train has just chugged its way through the Hoosac Tunnel. If each car on the train is about 80-feet long, how many cars would you count as the train passes by?
   Answer:

   _____

4. BONUS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT: Use available classroom materials. Work with a partner. See who can build the longest tunnel.

Activity Sheet Four: COW CALCULATIONS

Please show your work, and how you solved each problem. Label your answers.

1. There are six groups of cows grazing in the pasture. Five groups have eight cows. If there are fifty cows in the pasture, how many cows are in the last group?
   Answer:

   _____

2. It takes 5 minutes to milk a cow by machine. It takes 15 minutes to milk one by hand. The farmer only has an hour and a half to milk his cows in the morning. How many can he milk by machine? By hand?
   Answers:

   _____

   _____

3. Dragon the cow is milked twice a day at Cricket Creek Farm. She produces 16 pounds of milk per milking. How many pounds does she produce every day?
   Answer:

   _____

4. One gallon of milk weighs 8 pounds. Buddy the cow produces 36 pounds per day. How many gallons is that? How many quarts of milk?
   Answers:

   _____
   _____

5. It takes about 30 pounds of milk to make a 3 pound wheel of cheese. How many ounces of cheese is that? BONUS QUESTION: How many gallons of milk are needed to make 1 pound of cheese?
   Answers:

   _____
   _____

Activity Sheet Five: TAKE A HIKE

Explore the map of Bartholomew's Cobble to discover your answers.
Please show your work, and how you solved each problem. Label your answers.

1. Ledges Trail is 0.5 miles. How long is that in feet? In yards? What river can you see from the trail?
   Answers:

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. The Tractor Path up Hurlburt's Hill and back to the Visitor's Center is 1.3 miles. How far do you have to hike to reach the scenic vista? In miles? In feet?
   Answers:

   _____

   _____

3. You take the Hal Borland Trail to visit Ashley House. Using the scale on the map, about how long, in feet, is this trail between parking lots?
   Answer:

   _____

4. What trail are you on if you have a view of the Konkapot River?
   Answer:

   _____

5. Contour lines let you picture the area on a map. These lines follow land at the same elevation. Lines close together show steeper land. Lines farther apart show flatter land. Is Bailey Trail a steep or flat trail? Find two trails that are higher than Bailey.
   Answers:

   _____

   _____ and _____