



Cortesi

# save our history™: american lighthouses

airdates: **september 20, december 6  
& january 31**

*Save Our History* is The History Channel's award-winning national campaign dedicated to historic preservation and history education. As part of this initiative, The History Channel produces documentaries and corresponding teaching materials for educators free of charge. *Save Our History: American Lighthouses* and this companion guide focus on the plight of some of America's oldest and most famous lighthouses. These structures reflect the maritime, economic, immigration, and cultural history of the United States. Once majestic beacons to seafarers, many of America's lighthouses are on the verge of collapse. *Save Our History: American Lighthouses* documents the efforts to restore and preserve these national treasures.

## national standards

This teacher's guide fulfills the following National Standards for History as developed by the National Center for History in the Schools: Historical Thinking Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for American History for grades K-4 (Topic 2, Standard 3; Topic 3, Standard 6) and for grades 5-12 (Eras 3-7).

## curriculum links

*Save Our History: American Lighthouses* is suitable for K-6 units on American history and culture, social studies, maritime history, and historical preservation.

## objectives

Students will be able to define preservation and explain the importance of preserving historical places. They will explore the role of lighthouses in American history and the importance of maritime travel and safety in America's development, expansion, economy, and military strength.

## background

Lighthouses provided safety to American mariners in the early years of our country and continue to guide them to this day. Whale-oil lamps and prismatic lenses in lighthouses enabled ships to navigate easily, even when they were twenty miles out at sea. The lighthouse

keeper lived an isolated life, making sure the oil in the lamp was always full, the lens was always clean, and the lighthouse was in good repair. Eventually, most lighthouses switched to automation and the lighthouse keeper vanished entirely. Without the necessary caretakers, the buildings began to succumb to the fierce elements that lighthouses encounter year after year. Around the country, communities have banded together to restore local lighthouses.

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The following lighthouses are featured in *Save Our History: American Lighthouses*:

**Bodie Island Lighthouse** – Outerbanks, NC: A stunningly beautiful light station that houses a rare first order Fresnel lens in its tower. Yet, looks are deceiving; the Bodie Island Lighthouse is in serious danger of collapsing, and estimates to restore it run into the millions.

**Cape Hatteras Lighthouse** – Outer Banks, NC: America's tallest and most recognizable lighthouse has guided ships through the treacherous Diamond Shoals since 1803.

**Currituck Beach Lighthouse** – Outer Banks, NC: This lighthouse is one of the great success stories of lighthouse restoration. After twenty years and \$1.5 million, this exact twin of the Bodie Island Light Station is fully operational and a major tourist attraction in Currituck County.

**Little River Lighthouse** – Cutler Harbor, ME: After \$25,000 in renovations and twelve months of hard work, the Little River Lighthouse is fully operational for the first time in over twenty-five years.

**Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse** – New Castle, NH: Begun in 1771, this is one of America’s oldest lighthouses. Connie Small, the wife of the last keeper for this lighthouse, tells the harrowing story of how her husband’s sickness during a nor’easter left her in charge of the lighthouse.

**Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse** – Rockland, ME: When this lighthouse became fully automated in the 1960s, there was discussion of tearing the building down and replacing it with a simple lightpole. Massive community support for the lighthouse brought about a tremendous restoration effort.

**St. George Reef Lighthouse** – Crescent City, CA: Six miles off the coast of Crescent City, this mammoth granite lighthouse was the most expensive ever built in America. Several of this lighthouse’s keepers were killed due to the harsh elements and extreme isolation during their tenure, and eventually the lighthouse was replaced with a lighted buoy. Now, one of the most uniquely challenging lighthouse restoration projects has been undertaken here.

**St. Helena Island Lighthouse** – Mackinaw Island, MI: After being abandoned in 1920, a restoration project was undertaken in 1986 to save this horribly deteriorated lighthouse. Without much money, the project has relied upon the hard work of a troop of Boy Scouts from Ann Arbor.

## discussion questions

1. What was the role of lighthouses in America’s past? Do they have a role in America’s present and future?
  2. What is the purpose of a lighthouse? What service does a lighthouse provide?
  3. Why are so many of America’s lighthouses endangered?
  4. Today most lighthouse beacons are electric. How were they lit before the use of electricity?
  5. What branch of the U.S. Armed Forces maintains the beacons of lighthouses today?
  6. How would you describe the lighthouse keeper’s job and life?
  7. Even with advanced technology, lighthouses are still needed today. Why do we still need them despite many new technologies?
  8. What is the American Lighthouse Foundation? What does the foundation do? How does it accomplish its goals?
  9. What is a Fresnel lens?
  10. Discuss why it is so important to save our lighthouses. How will we lose a part of our history if we do not restore and preserve these landmarks?
- ① For additional questions visit us online at [HistoryChannel.com/classroom](http://HistoryChannel.com/classroom)

## activities

### previewing activities

1. Establish a clear understanding of preservation. If students are at an appropriate reading level, have them look up preservation in a dictionary; otherwise, read the definition aloud to them. Ask students, “What does historical preservation mean? Why should we care about old buildings and landmarks such as lighthouses?”
2. Familiarize students with the historical importance of lighthouses in America’s past, especially in its growth, maritime strength, economy, and military past. Discuss the relationship between lighthouses, American history, and American geographic features.

### viewing activity

1. Have students fill out the Student Worksheet, found online at [HistoryChannel.com/classroom](http://HistoryChannel.com/classroom), while they are viewing *Save Our History: American Lighthouses*. The chart asks students for the state the lighthouse is located in, as well as the year it was built and why it needs to be restored.

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# activities (continued)

## postviewing activities

1. Have students create their own lighthouses using cardboard, papier-mâché, or blocks.
  2. Have students create mobiles illustrating the lighthouses highlighted in *Save Our History: American Lighthouses*.
  3. Have students create an illustrated map of the United States that shows the location of each of the featured lighthouses.
  4. Instruct students to choose one of the lighthouses highlighted in *Save Our History: American Lighthouses* and write its “biography.”
  5. Ask students what they can do to help save our lighthouses. Have students brainstorm with fellow students in small groups on how they can make a difference in the preservation of America’s lighthouses.
  6. Have students write an acrostic poem in which the first letter of each line spells the word lighthouse, or a related term, when read in sequence.
- ① For additional activities, visit us online at [HistoryChannel.com/classroom](http://HistoryChannel.com/classroom)

# vocabulary

**automation** ■ (n.) the automatic control or operation of machinery

**elated** ■ (adj.) proud or joyful; extremely happy

**heroic** ■ (adj.) very brave or daring

**isolate** ■ (v.) to set apart or to cut off from others

**perilous** ■ (adj.) dangerous

**precarious** ■ (adj.) lacking in stability or security; dangerous

**replenish** ■ (v.) to refill or to make complete again

**restoration** ■ (n.) the act of bringing something back to its original condition

# resources

## websites & books

### web sites

- [www.HistoryChannel.com/classroom](http://www.HistoryChannel.com/classroom)  
Save Our History: American Lighthouses
- [www.nps.gov/caha/bdlh.htm](http://www.nps.gov/caha/bdlh.htm)  
Bodie Island Lighthouse, North Carolina
- [www.hatteras-nc.com/light](http://www.hatteras-nc.com/light)  
Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, North Carolina
- [www.currituckbeachlight.com](http://www.currituckbeachlight.com)  
Currituck Beach Lighthouse, North Carolina
- [www.lighthousefoundation.org/littleriver.html](http://www.lighthousefoundation.org/littleriver.html)  
Little River Lighthouse, Maine
- [www.lighthousefoundation.org/portsmouth.html](http://www.lighthousefoundation.org/portsmouth.html)  
Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse, New Hampshire
- [www.midcoast.com/~brkwater](http://www.midcoast.com/~brkwater)  
Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse, Maine
- [www.northerncalifornia.net/culture/lighthouses/sgrlps](http://www.northerncalifornia.net/culture/lighthouses/sgrlps)  
St. George Reef Lighthouse, California
- [sthelena.hypermart.net/index.html](http://sthelena.hypermart.net/index.html)  
St. Helena Island Lighthouse, Michigan

### books

- Bachelor, John. *North American Lighthouses Coloring Book*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999. Reading level: Ages 6–9.
- Gibbons, Gail. *Beacons of Light: Lighthouses*. New York: Morrow, William & Co., 1992. Reading level: Ages 8–10.
- Gillon, Edmund, V. *Easy-to-Make Lighthouse*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1991. Reading level: Ages 9–12.
- Vaughan, Marcia K. *Abbie Against the Storm: The True Story of a Young Heroine and a Lighthouse*. Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth. Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing, 1999. Reading level: Ages 6–8.

① For additional resources, visit us online at [HistoryChannel.com/classroom](http://HistoryChannel.com/classroom).

