



Menace on Horse Creek Trail
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Teacher's Guide

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This guide is designed to facilitate your use of the story “Menace on Horse Creek Trail.” For each chapter you will find a set of comprehension questions, a vocabulary list with definitions, a lesson incorporating use of the newspaper, and a topic/question that can be used for discussion or as writing activity assignment.

Chapter One - Stampede

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nancy and Mary Katherine want to cover their mouths with their aprons? They wanted to cover their mouths to stop the dust from making them cough.
2. Why was Mary Katherine's mother so weak? She just had a baby.
3. What happened to Mary Katherine during the stampede? She got a gash on her head.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Engulfing: To swallow up or overwhelm by overflowing and enclosing

Devastation: That which has been destroyed

Turmoil: A state of extreme confusion or agitation

News on the Trail

The stampede caused a great deal of destruction to the wagon train. Have the students look through the newspaper for another act of destruction. They can write a description of the event. What is the effect of this destruction on its region?

Talk About It

Ask students to talk about trips they've taken and places that they have seen. What do they think Nancy feels like at this point in her long journey?

Learning Standards: writing descriptions, understanding environmental consequences

Chapter Two - Aftermath

Comprehension Questions

1. What was Doc making in the pot? Doc was making a poultice for Pa.
2. How much further did they have to go to get to Oregon? They had a thousand miles to go.
3. What did Nancy promise Pa? She promised that she would be strong and brave and get her ma to Oregon.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Poultice: A soft moist mass of bread, meal, clay, or other adhesive substance, usually heated, spread on cloth, and applied to warm, moisten, or stimulate an aching or inflamed part of the body

Anguished: Feeling, expressing, or caused by physical or mental pain

Flinch: To start or wince involuntarily, as from surprise or pain

Debris: The scattered remains of something broken or destroyed; rubble or wreckage

News on the Trail

The wagon train is headed to Oregon from Plum Creek, Nebraska. Have the students locate these places on a map from the newspaper. Have them list other places the wagon train will pass through in order to complete their journey.

Talk About It

Have your students ever experienced the illness of someone they are close to? Can they relate to what Nancy is going through? How do they think Pa's death will impact on Nancy's life?

Learning Standards: locating diverse places, reading maps

Chapter Three - Fever

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nancy do most of the chores? Ma was distracted since Pa died.
2. What did Nancy make for dinner? She made some bacon and johnnycake.
3. What suggestion did Doc make to Nancy? He said they should work together as a team and cook together.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Exhausted: To wear out completely

Goad: An agent or means of prodding or urging; a stimulus

Assuring: To give confidence to; reassure

News on the Trail

Nancy is forced to take on a great deal of responsibility including driving the wagon and cooking the family meals. Have the students go on a search through the newspaper to find some items that could aid Nancy with those chores. Have them make a list of the items and explain how each one would make life easier.

Talk About It

What responsibilities do your students take on at home? Would they like to do more or less than they do? Why?

Learning Standards: understanding the benefits of technology, locating information

Chapter Four - Indians

Comprehension Questions

1. When did they plan to ford the South Platt River? They planned to get there before noon.
2. What were the Indians trying to tell Mr. Estes? The river is swollen, the current fast and dangerous and they will help the group cross for a price.
3. What did the Indians want to barter? They wanted shirts, dresses, ribbons and beads for their services.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Reveled: To take great pleasure or delight

Guttural: Having a harsh grating quality, as certain sounds produced in the back of the mouth

Guarantees: A pledge that something will be performed in a specified manner

News on the Trail

Some of the men dislike the Indians and make remarks that stereotype them. As a class, discuss the reasons people stereotype others. Then the students can search the comics for other characters that are stereotyped. Have them analyze the characters and explain whether or not the stereotyping fits.

Talk About It

What do your students know about prejudice and discrimination? Do they think the men on the wagon train are prejudiced towards the Indians? How do your students think that prejudice hurts our society?

Learning Standards: understanding stereotyping, analyzing characters

Chapter Five - Revenge

Comprehension Questions

1. Where does Mr. Estes think crossing the river would be less treacherous? He thinks it would be less treacherous by using the Horse Creek Trail.
2. Who voted not to take help from the Sioux? Doc and Derek McCaw voted not to take the Sioux's help.
3. What did they trade with the Indians? They traded calico clothing for fresh fish, dried buffalo tongues and hides.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Welfare: Health, happiness, and good fortune; well-being

Treacherous: Marked by unforeseen hazards; dangerous or deceptive

Insulted: To treat with gross insensitivity, insolence, or contemptuous rudeness

News on the Trail

The men are divided over whether they should trust the motives of the Indians. Have the students debate both sides of the issue. Then have the class peruse the newspaper to find groups who are unable to trust each other and to identify the results of their lack of trust. What groups of people are able to work together as a result of their trust? The students can write a comparison between the two groups.

Talk About It

What do your students think of the barter method of exchange? How is it different from our market type economy? Ask them to compare barter with exchanging money for goods or services. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each system?

Learning Standards: comparing, contrasting, understanding human values

Chapter Six – Death on the Trail

Comprehension Questions

1. What is Doc's theory about why the people are getting sick? He thinks they are getting sick from the water.
2. Why was it so good that it rained? The rain filled the water barrels.
3. What did Selinda want to do when she got better? She wanted to hunt for wildflowers.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Assessment: The act of assessing; appraisal

Delirious: Of, suffering from, or characteristic of delirium

Clambered: To climb with difficulty, especially on all fours; scramble

News on the Trail

Doc's responsibility is to treat the people on the wagon train and to attempt to stop the spread of fever. He thinks people are getting sick from drinking contaminated water while others believe that the Indians poisoned them. Have the students use the newspaper to find some of the most pressing health issues today. What is the problem and what is being done to solve it?

Talk About It

Why do your students think that some people were so quick to suspect the Indians? Do your students think the Indians are guilty? Why?

Quite a few people are getting sick and dying on this trip. You may want students to do some online research about the pioneers who went West and the rates of survival on these trips.

Learning Standards: understanding health issues, evaluating

Chapter Seven – A Bad Batch

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Nancy want to talk to Doc? She thinks some of the medicine was a bad batch.
2. What were the twins bickering about? They were bickering about who would get a bigger hotcake.
3. What did Nancy discover when she went to wake up Doc? She found that he was sick and might have the fever.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Extraordinary: Highly exceptional; remarkable

Bickering: To engage in a petty, bad-tempered quarrel; squabble

Overwhelmed: To present with an excessive amount

News on the Trail

Doc's wagon is bare and has few supplies or household goods. Have your class go on a newspaper shopping spree for Doc. They should write a shopping list for ten important items he needs. They can write down the name of the store where the item can be purchased and the price.

Talk About It

Do your students think that Nancy is a good sister? Are there times when students have to take care of their younger siblings or cousins? What is involved in taking care of kids? What attributes does a person have to have in order to be a good babysitter?

Learning Standards: making consumer decisions, prioritizing

Chapter Eight – Too Long To Wait

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nancy decide to give Doc medicine right away? She remembered that Doc said Selinda didn't get medicine soon enough.
2. What did Nancy find in Doc's trunk? She found a stack of papers and a loose newspaper clipping with an obituary.
3. What did Doc do with the medicine Nancy offered him? He knocked the bottle away.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Urgency: The quality or condition of being urgent; pressing importance

Logical: Reasoning in a clear and consistent manner

Clenched: To close tightly

News on the Trail

Nancy found an obituary of Miss Helen Carpenter inside Doc's trunk. An obituary contains important information about a person's life and the statistics about the death.

Have students select ten obituaries and to list the ages of each person at death. The students can determine the mean, medium and mode of their list.

Talk About It

Helen Carpenter was young when she died. It's always hard to accept the death of a young person. But, just because she was young, doesn't mean she won't be remembered.

What would your students want to be remembered for? Have the students write some important information about their lives.

Learning Standards: writing autobiographies, computing mean, medium, mode

Chapter Nine – A Silent White Stone

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nancy's mother think Doc knocked the medicine bottle away? She thought Doc was saving the medicine for others.
2. Why was the obituary so bothersome to Nancy? She was bothered by the date of the obituary, April 3rd, because Doc told the leaders that he arrived in town the day before the wagon train left on April 15th.
3. Why does Mary Katherine think Micajah might be able to help solve the puzzle about Doc? Micajah is from St Joseph and he might know Helen Carpenter.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Spasm: A sudden, involuntary contraction of a muscle or group of muscles

Radiating: To issue or emerge in rays or waves

Confided: To tell (something) in confidence

News on the Trail

Nancy is forced to overcome adversity throughout the journey. Her father and good friend are dead and her mother is very ill. Have the class use their newspapers to find an example of someone who successfully overcame adversity. Can they also find someone who was not successful? Have the class create a graphic organizer comparing what traits these people have in common and what traits are different.

Talk About It

Nancy is on quite an adventurous journey. Would your students want to go on a similar trip? Could they travel like that without modern conveniences? Have them talk about the best and worst parts of a wagon train trip. If they could take just one modern item along, what would they choose?

Learning Standards: comparing, contrasting, creating graphic representations

Chapter Ten – A Flood of Suspicions

Comprehension Questions

1. What did all the people who got better have in common? They all took Doc's medicine.
2. Who did Mary Katherine suggest should drive the ox team for Nancy? Mary Katherine suggested Micajah should drive the ox team.
3. How does Micajah know Helen Carpenter? She was one of his sister's friends in school.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Blaring: To sound loudly and stridently

Riled: To stir to anger

Wavered: To exhibit irresolution or indecision; vacillate

News on the Trail

Nancy and Micajah are suspicious about Doc's behavior because Doc did not tell the truth and they also question the effectiveness of his medicine. On this trip it is crucial to have a good doctor because of the many health risks and possibilities of injury. Have the students consider what they think are important characteristics for a good doctor. They can check the Help Wanted ads in the newspaper and write their own qualifications for a doctor for their wagon train trip.

Talk About It

Besides a doctor, what other kinds of people would students want with them on a trip like this one? If they could take 3 people, who would they be?

Learning Standards: evaluating characteristics, writing classified ads

Chapter Eleven – A Test

Comprehension Questions

1. What are the ingredients of the concoction? They used sugar, cornstarch, apples and peaches.
2. What do Nancy, Micajah and Mary Katherine decide to do when Doc refuses to take the medicine? They decide to search his wagon to see what he is hiding.
3. How will Nancy see Micajah in the dark? He will wear buckskin and it stands out in the moonlight.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Recollect: To remember something; have a recollection

Relapse: To regress after partial recovery from illness

Obliged: To make indebted or grateful

Gestured: The act of moving the limbs or body as an expression of thought or emphasis

News on the Trail

Mary Katherine's parents discuss whether or not it is right to go through a person's belongings without their permission even if you are trying to help other people. They are forced to make a value judgement about what to do. Have the students look through the newspaper to find an example of someone who is making a judgment based on their values. They should write an explanation and define different sides of the issue.

Talk About It

Ask your students to think about moral judgments and how they are made. For example, is it ever okay to lie? What about if the lie protects someone from being hurt? Is it ever okay to steal? What if you have no money and you have a sick child in need of medicine? Allow time for a discussion about how your moral judgments can guide your choices about how to behave.

Learning Standards: making value judgements, understanding point of view

Chapter Twelve – The Most Extraordinary Medicine in the World

Comprehension Questions

1. Where were the advertisements? The advertisements were in Doc's wagon in a trunk.
2. Who does Nancy think Doc really is? She thinks he is Thomas Locke from a traveling medicine show.
3. Why does Nancy come to tears? She believes that a real doctor would have saved her father's life.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Whickering: To whinny

Accustomed: To familiarize, as by constant practice, use, or habit

Afflictions: A condition of pain, suffering, or distress

News on the Trail

The author sets the scene by describing the landscape in the moonlight -- the jutting rocks are like wicked creatures and the oxen moan like ghosts. The students can use their newspaper to find a description of a setting. Have them add to the description or write a new one of their own.

Talk About It

Doc has apparently lied about who he is. That lie casts suspicion on everything he does. Allow your students some time to talk about how a lie can sometimes snowball into a bigger and bigger problem. Sir Walter Scott (although most people think it's Shakespeare) said, Oh! what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive! (Note: practice was spelled differently then.)

Write that quote on the board and allow time for students to tell what they think it means.

Learning Standards: writing descriptions, using figurative language

Chapter Thirteen – Murder!

Comprehension Questions

1. What did Nancy offer to make Doc? She offered to make him elderberry tea.
2. What word was painted over on Doc's wagon? The word was "TONIC."
3. Why did Helen Carpenter's father think she died? He thought she was poisoned by a medicine show quack.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Haggard: Appearing worn and exhausted; gaunt

Evade: To avoid giving a direct answer to

Yoking: To fit or join with a yoke or harness

Bustling: full of energetic and noisy activity

News on the Trail

Nancy thinks she will uncover the words "MIRACLE TONIC" on the side of Doc's wagon. What else do your students think could be written on the wagon to advertise the traveling medicine show? Write their responses on the board. Then the students can create their own newspaper advertisements using some of their responses. They should check the ads in the newspaper to use as a guide.

Talk About It

Nancy offers to make Doc a cup of tea to help him to feel better. What do your students like done for them when they are sick? What are some of their traditions that make them feel better when they are ill?

Learning Standards: brainstorming, writing newspaper advertisements

Chapter Fourteen – Rocky Trail

Comprehension Questions

1. To where did Doc say he has traveled? He said he traveled to London, Paris and Rome.
2. According to Nancy, what benefit is there for living in one place all your life? You know everybody.
3. How did Nancy find the newspaper about the banker's daughter? She pulled out the saddle blanket and the newspaper slid out from under the seat.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Gnawed: To afflict or worry persistently

Speculation: Reasoning based on inconclusive evidence; conjecture or supposition

Reeled: To feel dizzy

News on the Trail

Nancy pulled out the newspaper with the headline “Prominent banker’s daughter may have been murdered.” There is a great deal of information in the headline of a newspaper article. Have your students look at headlines on the front page without reading the articles. Have them predict and then write what they think each story is about just from reading the headline. They can make a comparison of their predictions to the actual story. Then they can re-write the headline.

Talk About It

Allow some time for students to talk about the places they’ve lived. Who in class has lived in the most places? The fewest? What do students think are some of the advantages and disadvantages of moving?

Learning Standards: predicting, comparing

Chapter Fifteen - Hope

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Doc leave town? He was afraid he would be accused of causing Helen Carpenter's death and wouldn't be treated fairly.
2. Why didn't Doc tell the truth about himself to the folks on the wagon train? He cared about them and didn't want to lose their respect.
3. What was wrong with Nancy's mother? She was having a baby.

Vocabulary

Have students look up the following words in the dictionary and write the definitions and identify the root word where appropriate. The definitions are provided here for your use.

Authorities: One that is invested with power, especially a government or body of government officials

Hypochondriac: an individual affected with hypochondria , a preoccupation with health or disease is so intense that it disrupts normal living habits

Deceive: To cause to believe what is not true; mislead

News on the Trail

Nancy decides they should name her new baby sister "Hope." Have the class discuss what choosing this name says about Nancy's personality. After all the bad things that have happened in her life, she still chooses the name, "Hope," but why? Nancy and her family want to make a new start in Oregon. Who in the news also has an opportunity to make a new start? Have the class write about that situation.

Talk About It

What gives your students hope for the future? Are they optimists or pessimists?

Learning Standards: understanding the human experience, capturing feelings