



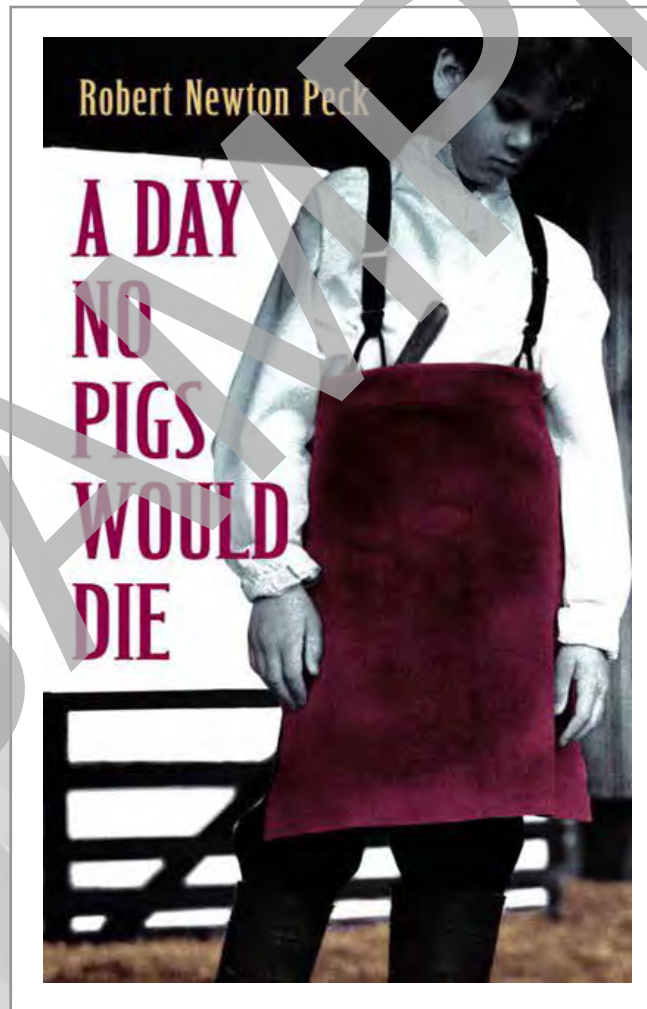
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **A Day No Pigs Would Die**

Robert Newton Peck



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# A Day No Pigs Would Die

Robert Newton Peck

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research

### Literary Elements

Point of view, colloquial  
expressions, similes

### Vocabulary

Context clues, word  
mapping

### Comprehension

Comparison/contrast

### Writing

Research project, narrative,  
sensory details, descriptive

### Listening/Speaking

Dramatization

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## Introduction

*A Day No Pigs Would Die* is a novel about a Vermont Shaker farm boy, his relationship with his father and with the world around him, and his journey from childhood to manhood. The story is semi-autobiographical, for Robert Newton Peck also grew up on a farm in Vermont. His father, the “real” Haven Peck, was a hog butcherer, and the author still feels that the best lessons are those learned from nature and from “plain” people. (See the biographical information on Peck on page 4.)

While the novel may appear to be a simple nostalgic journey into the author’s boyhood, it is really much more than that. There is pain and love and humor and wisdom in this look at a lifestyle very different than most young readers can imagine, and for today’s students—surrounded by a high-tech, high-speed world—there is a suggestion to take time to think about values and ideals like hard work, respect for one another and for nature, and doing what must be done no matter how difficult it is.

*A Day No Pigs Would Die* is categorized as historical fiction, taking place just before the Great Depression. More important in the historical sense is that young Robert and his family are Shakers—a religious sect that is now nearly defunct, but whose philosophies and social and economic accomplishments are interesting to study. With its emphasis on the brutality and beauty of natural balance, the novel is also quite topical.

### Using the Guide

A research project is suggested as the primary initiating activity. You may want to integrate this with a unit on using the library as students seek out reference materials for their chosen topics, as well as with a writing and speech unit as they compile and present their reports. Cooperative research groups may work well for this project.

Since you may choose not to use the research project as your initiating activity, we have included background information on the Shakers, on Calvin Coolidge, and on Robert Newton Peck. You may want to give the information to students in lecture form to center your introduction on the theme of the novel rather than on its historical features.

On page 6, you will find a reproducible dialogue journal. Its purpose is to promote active reading and maintain interest by asking students to formulate and write down questions they have about each reading section before, during, and after the reading. They should also enter the answers to their questions or, if an answer was not provided, so indicate.

An attribute web reproducible and an explanation of how the webs can be used are also included. Attribute webs are good thought-joggers, and they help students to keep the characters straight. When they complete a web for each of the main characters, they can

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## Student Presentations

If you used the research activity, have students present information on Ethan Allen, Abner Doubleday, Farm Lingo, and Calvin Coolidge.

## Suggestion for Writing

Robert says his father would look at a bicycle as a “work of the Devil” or a “frill.” Most families have their own definitions of “frills.” What things are considered frills in your family? What things do you have that Robert’s father probably would not approve of?

## Chapters 5 and 6 Pages 41-59

### Vocabulary

comely 42

reckoning 52

tribulation 57

gumption 43

cornet 54

geegaws 58

crawdad 45

expulsion 54

silage 58

prosperous 45

partial 55

### Discussion Questions

1. What made April such a pleasant time of year for Robert? *(There were little rivers all around from the spring run-off, and Robert amused himself by making flutterwheels, catching frogs, and just enjoying the emerging warmth of the sun.)*
2. Give an example of Robert’s feelings for Pinky. *(When she is frightened, he holds her close to calm her. He is proud of the fact that she is his pig. She follows him like a dog.)*
3. Did Robert really believe he could teach a frog to jump backwards to make its front legs as big as its hind legs, or did he know his dad was joking? *(He probably knew it was a joke, but decided to try it just for fun.)*
4. Who is Robert named after? *(Robert Rogers, the Indian fighter.)* Were you named after anyone? Who? Why?
5. Locate Ticonderoga and Lake George on a map. “Ticonderoga” is an Indian name. What other Indian names of towns, lakes, and rivers can you find on the map?
6. Who is Miss Sarah? *(the barn cat)* How many kittens did she have? *(three)*

7. How did Robert feel on the last day of school? (*overjoyed*)
8. What happened when Robert showed his report card to Aunt Matty? (*She was horrified to see he had gotten a "D" in English, and decided she should tutor him.*)
9. Robert's description of a "remedy" seems a little bit crude for award-winning literature. Why do you suppose the author chose to include it? (*It adds realism, and most characters can identify with the unpleasant results of the remedy he was thinking of.*)
10. Why did Robert find the idea of Aunt Matty being a tutor so funny? (*He thought she meant she was going to play the cornet, and the image he saw was hilarious.*)
11. Why was Robert afraid of the Baptists? (*He thought the full-immersion baptism practiced by the Baptists meant that a person would either drown and go to Hell or come to the surface and be a Baptist.*) Where do you imagine he got his ideas?
12. What does it mean to diagram a sentence? (*break it into parts*) (See Activities.)
13. Was the English lesson a success? How do you know? (*No. Aunt Matty said next time she'd teach the pig.*)

### Activities

Explain that grammar students once spent a lot of time diagramming sentences. Diagramming is a good way to make sure that a sentence is complete, i.e., has a subject and verb, that prepositions have objects, and so forth. Write on the board the sentence Aunt Matty wanted Robert to diagram:

*Jack hit the ball hard with Joe's yellow bat.*

Then show them how to diagram the sentence. A suggestion framework is shown below. You may want to have the students diagram some sentences on their own.

