



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Riddle of Pennecroft Farm

Dorothea Jensen

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Riddle of Pennecroft Farm

Dorothea Jensen

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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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Summary

Moving to Pennsylvania from Minnesota provides Lars with a lesson in colonial history, a riddle, a mystery, and a “shade,” or apparition, for help and companionship. The only way to save Penncroft Farm for his family is to find the new will made by Aunt Cass. She has put it in her hidey-hole, and left clues for Lars. Will his ability to make puns enable Lars to unravel the riddle before the farm is converted into a museum, or will Aunt Cass bamboozle him once again?

About the Author

Dorothea Jensen is a former teacher of English. After moving to Minnesota from Philadelphia, she wrote *The Riddle of Penncroft Farm* to make the American Revolution come alive for her own children. She and her family now live in southern New Hampshire, in a colonial house built in the 1700s.

Please be selective, and use discretion when choosing the activities that you will do with the unit. It is not intended that everything be done, but that discretionary choices made are the most appropriate for your use and group of students. A wide range has been provided so that individuals as well as groups may benefit from these selections.

Initiating Activities

Make a banner to hang in the room with a riddle statement, such as “Riddle Me This.” Put some riddles on banners, and place those in the room also. For example:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Q: What’s a small dog suffering from chills? | A: A pupsickle |
| Q: Who invented the pendulum? | A: Pendulum Franklin |
| Q: Do we get fur from a skunk? | A: Yes, as fur as possible. |
| Q: What’s the best way to drive a baby buggy? | A: Tickle its feet. |
| Q: What did Paul Revere say when he passed a London barbershop? | A: “The British are combing.” |
| Q: What do they call the Englishman who builds 10 boats a month? | A: Sir Launchalot |

Ask for volunteers to define the word **riddle**. Record the definitions given. (*Riddle: A mystifying, misleading, or puzzling question posed as a problem to be solved or guessed; something or someone difficult to understand; to speak in or propound riddles; a coarse sieve; to pierce with many holes.*)

Have the students record original illustrated riddles to place on the bulletin board.

Bulletin Board Idea

Cover the bulletin board with plain background paper. Place the word RIDDLE and one riddle on the board, saving the remaining space for original riddles from the group.

Recommended Procedure

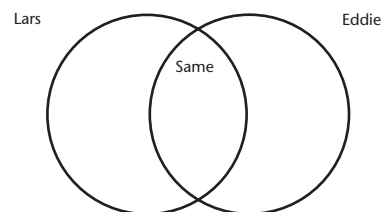
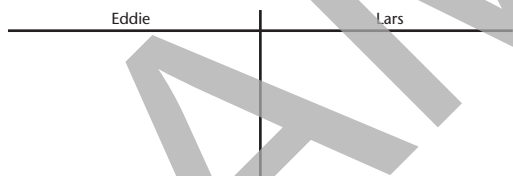
This book may be used in several ways: a) read to the entire class; b) read with the class; c) read in reading groups; d) read individually. It may be read a chapter at a time, using the DRTA, Directed Reading Thinking Activity, Method. This technique involves reading a selection, and then predicting what will happen next.

Questions and activities at the end of each chapter, as well as any supplementary activities, are provided. Using discretion, select those which are suitable for use by the students in your group.

Graphic Organizers

Included in the Novel Unit are several types of graphic organizers, such as the Venn Diagram, the T-Chart, and brainstorming or cluster circles. A variety of possible answers should be listed by the teacher, either on large sheets of paper or the chalkboard. Only then should the students be asked to develop their own graphics. Encourage students to express their opinions and what they know about a topic. List these opinions and “facts.” Later, as the students read and research, they may discover that some of their ideas are incorrect. These ideas may be crossed out on the sheets or board. Students should be encouraged to elaborate on their answers, justify their opinions, prove their predictions, and relate what they have read to their own lives.

T-Charts show likenesses and differences of two characters, plots, settings, etc. Venn Diagrams also illustrate the overlaps, or similarities, between characters’ actions or traits.



Previewing the Book

Look at the cover of the book. What do you think the illustrator wants to tell the reader about the story? Who do you think the two characters pictured might be? Why do you think they are not dressed in the same type of clothing? Is there something other than the clothing that makes them appear different from one another? Why do you think the illustrator pictured the two characters in that particular way? Where do you think the story might take place? Make a prediction about the story.

Chapter 5: “Bamboozling Aunt Cass”—Pages 59-72

Vocabulary

boggled 59 babbled 65 solemnity 66 absentmindedly 66

Vocabulary Activity

Make up a tongue twister using the vocabulary words boggled, babbled, and other words that begin with the letter/sound **b**. Try to say the tongue twister fast three times, and then try to say it faster and faster. For example: **Benny babbled 'til he boggled on a bright blue blustery day!**

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Lars is the only one at the family Halloween party not in costume. His father makes the comment, page 65, “Funny how Lars has always hated wearing costumes!” However, when Aunt Cass leaves the room, Mr. Olafson says to Lars, page 65, “I would think you could make an effort, Lars. After all, Aunt Cass won’t have too many more Halloweens to celebrate. If your mother and I can dress up to please her, I should think you could...” What is your reaction to Mr. Olafson’s reasoning about the costume? Do you think Lars should wear a costume to please Aunt Cass? Why? Why not? Discuss the feelings of the members of the group. Is it necessary to come to an agreement on this issue?
2. Aunt Cass, page 66, tells L. George about the value of history. What does she tell him? (*Page 66, “People have always managed to muddle through, and I believe they always will. I guess it’s human nature to forget the bad times, gloss ‘em over, shine ‘em up, and put ‘em all neat and clean in the history books.”*) Do you agree or disagree with Aunt Cass? Why? Give an example of some event in history that you think has been “cleaned” before it was put into a history book. Discuss events and opinions of group members.

Post-reading Activities

1. Lars thinks that the Halloween party is much like his Aunt Cass, “a strange mixture of fun and solemnity.” (page 66) Think of a situation or a person that is, to you, a strange mixture. Tell of your choice and of the mix that is involved.
2. The judge mentions, page 67, that Aunt Cass has a “hidey-hole that beats the bank!” Describe a location that is known to you that you think would make a good “hidey-hole.” Give the description to a group member. Can your location be identified? Do you need to make some revisions so that the description is complete? You want those who read your description to be able to identify the location of your “hidey-hole.”
3. Make a prediction concerning the message that Aunt Cass leaves for L. George. Does it have a special meaning?

Chapter 6: “The Riddle Song”—Pages 73-86

Vocabulary

quavered 86

Vocabulary Activity

Define the word *quavered* and use it in a limerick. A limerick is a light, humorous or nonsensical verse of five lines, usually with the rhyme scheme of *aabba*. For example:

*He started to quaver and quake,
Like Jello pushed with a rake.
He quavered left and right;
A really terrible sight!
He needed to be tied to a stake.*

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Eddie Owens tries to sit next to some children on the bus, but is rebuffed by them. (page 76) Why do you think this happens to Eddie? Discuss the possible causes for Eddie’s problem, and list some advice that might be given to him.
2. Lars George listens as the people who knew his Aunt Cass tell about her. He thinks that each person has seen a slightly different side of his Aunt Cass. To what does he liken the memorial service? (Page 84, *He likens the service to the joining of the pieces of a puzzle to form a complete picture, the service making a picture of his Aunt Cass.*) Why do you think that each person has seen his aunt differently? Do you think that is true in real life? Do you think that you “see” people differently from others? Why? Why not?

Post-reading Activities

1. Learn “The Riddle Song.” Traditional riddle songs describe a knight who offers marriage if his love can answer the four questions:

The Riddle Song

*When she these questions answered had
The knight became exceeding glad
And after that 'tis verified
He made of her his lovely bride.
So now fair maids, all adieu,
This song I dedicate to you,
And wish you thus may constant prove
Unto the man you do love.*

*I gave my love a cherry that has no stone.
I gave my love a chicken that has no bone.
I gave my love a ring that has no end.
I gave my love a baby with no cryin’.*