

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

A Day No Pigs Would Die

by Robert Newton Peck

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Chapter 1

1. Because of his Shaker religion, the narrator dresses quite differently from his classmates. As a result, Edward Thatcher makes fun of him. Has anyone ever made fun of the way you dress? Have you ever been tempted to make fun of someone you thought dressed oddly? Why do you suppose people make fun of others?
2. The narrator has a great desire to return at some time and teach Edward Thatcher a lesson. Just about everyone has probably had a similar desire. Do you know anyone who plans to return to high school someday, just to show up all of his or her old classmates? How would you like to impress your friends from school ten years after you graduate?
3. Did you have any reaction to the description of the cow, the calf, and the narrator's actions that took up most of Chapter One? Is it too graphic, believable, exciting, or disgusting?

Chapter 2

4. This story is written in a rural, New England dialect. A dialect is a distinctive variety of a language spoken by members of an identifiable region, nation, or social class. Dialects differ in pronunciation, vocabulary and, often, in grammar. Write a dialogue between two or more people in some dialect that you're familiar with.

Response Journal

5. In a dialogue with a classmate who criticizes Robert, write a conversation in which, you defend the narrator for what he did.

Classmate: That Peck kid was stupid. He could have gotten himself killed helping that dumb old cow.

You:

6. From the little we have heard, what impression have you formed of the Peck family? Do they seem like people you will like or dislike? Would you like to have any of them for friends?

Chapter 3

7. Another New Englander, Robert Frost, has conditioned us to think of walls and fences as dividing people, but Haven Peck sees fences and walls as good things that help people get along. Think of some fences and walls you know of, or heard of, such as the Berlin Wall, prison walls, picket fences, etc. Do these types of barriers separate or bring people together? Explain.
8. The two opposing views on fences point out that people can have opposing opinions on just about anything in life. Can you express both a pro and a con belief on some controversy in the news? If not, take two of these choices and write down two opposite opinions about them.
- teenage curfews
 - mercy killings
 - the death penalty
 - animal research

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9. Robert becomes fearful that his father isn't going to let him keep the pig because it isn't the Shaker way to accept a reward for being neighborly. What issues does it raise in your mind?
10. Haven Peck explains some points of Shaker law to his son. Explain what you were able to understand of Shaker law from the conversation between father and son to a classmate who doesn't understand any of what was said.
11. In the first three chapters, there are a number of scenes that could have been illustrated, if the publisher had wanted to include pictures. Draw a picture of any of the scenes that caught your attention in these chapters.

Chapter 4

12. Even though Haven Peck can't spell the word "physics," he uses two principles of physics, involving a pole and a lever, to move the corn crib. From your understanding of physics, explain why the ox was able to move the corn crib with the help of the pole and the crank, but would not have been able to move it by simply being yoked to it?
13. What did you think of the conversation the characters had about Ethan Allen and Abner Doubleday? What would you have said to straighten them out?
14. Apparently, literacy is a requirement to vote in the novel, and regardless of how smart you might be in other areas, as Haven Peck is, you can't vote if you can't read or write. Have you any thoughts on this point?

Response Journal

15. This chapter ends with Robert Peck saying, “With Pinky next to me that night, I guess I must have been the luckiest boy in Learning.” Why do you suppose he feels lucky? Do you suppose the name of this town is meant to be symbolic? Of what?

Chapter 5

16. In Chapter Five, Robert describes how he spends a typical Sunday afternoon. How would you feel about growing up like that? What do you see as that lifestyle’s good and bad points?
17. In this kind of novel, readers frequently wait for something bad to happen, and, possibly, a bad thing is just about to occur. Do you get a similar feeling as you read this book? If so, what bad thing or things might happen?
18. What kind of reaction to the scene with the frog, the pig and the crow did you have?
19. Papa had said earlier that it’s his mission to work in the slaughterhouse killing pigs even though he becomes bone weary, because that is how he earns money to pay off the farm. Robert says that Papa gets stirred up when he fails to do his chores. Robert adds, “Right he should. Chores are my mission, not his.” Does this discussion of missions give rise to any thoughts about jobs you have to do?

Chapter 6

20. In this chapter, there is some understated humor that some readers could miss. If you spot some things that are meant to be funny, identify them and explain what makes them humorous.
21. It's probable that Robert got a "D" in English because he does not speak standard English. Aunt Matty plans to teach him diagramming. If you were going to help Robert speak correctly and get a better grade in English, what would you do to help him?

Chapter 7

22. What did you think of the scene with the hawk and the rabbit? Did you feel differently about it when Robert said that if the hawk ate the rabbit before he did, it was only because the hawk got there first?
23. Robert says that the heavens at sundown are his favorite sight. Describe one of your favorite sights and tell what you like about it.