

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Light in the Forest

by Conrad Richter

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ISBN 978-1-560389-841-6
Reorder No. 201611

Notes

Published in 1953, this novel is a piece of historical fiction. Historical fiction is a genre that places characters in accurately described historical settings. These stories blend historical facts with fictional plots, creating a story that could have occurred in the given setting. The stories are set in a historical period remote enough from the present to be considered history.

The Light in the Forest is a product of Conrad Richter's thorough research of the relationship between the Indians and the white settlers in eighteenth century Ohio and Pennsylvania. It is inspired by true accounts of white captives who tried to escape their biological families and return to their Indian foster homes, and is based on an actual event that occurred in 1764. During the fall of that year, Colonel Bouquet, who is an historic figure as well as a character in the book, marched with 1,500 soldiers into Ohio and commanded the Indians to release their white prisoners. The colonel and his troops arrived at Fort Pitt on November 9, 1764 with 206 former white captives, many of whom were angry at their forced return.

Parson Elder is another historical figure that appears as a character in *The Light in the Forest*. He was famous for being the "fighting parson" and organizer of the Paxton Boys. The Paxton Boys' did attack and kill 20 Conestogo Indians in late 1763. Those killed included women, children, and the elderly, all of whom were Christian converts. The Paxton Boys acted in response to a number of attacks on their community by the Pontiac Indians. As noted in the novel, western Pennsylvania settlers were angry about the unwillingness of eastern Pennsylvanian judges to punish Indians attackers.

All references are made from the fawcett books edition of The Light in the Forest copyright 1953

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. state why and in what way this book is a good example of the historical fiction genre.
2. identify and discuss how the book is a “coming of age” story about the protagonist.
3. discuss how and why the author shifts the point of view of the narrator.
4. discuss the major themes of the novel, including:
 - the difference in the Indian’s and white’s relationship with nature
 - True Son’s conflicting identities as both white and Indian
 - immoral acts of both sides during war.
5. identify and discuss the racist attitudes and actions of the whites against the Indians and vice versa.
6. discuss the history of treatment of Native Americans in the United States.
7. compare and contrast modern Native American communities to those depicted in the book.
8. identify and discuss the symbol of white men’s clothing in the novel.
9. understand, define, and give examples of the following literary terms:
 - simile
 - personification.
 - metaphor

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. The preface of the book is a quote from a William Wordsworth poem, and Conrad Richter takes the story's title from it. Study the lines of the poem and give an interpretation of how they relate to True Son's experiences.
2. Conrad Richter writes in the Acknowledgements that, "He can understand and sympathize with either side. His business is to be fair to them both." Do you think Richter is fair to both the whites and the Indians, or does he favor one side? Why or why not?
3. Based on the definition of historical fiction provided for you and the information in the Notes, what elements of the genre does *The Light in the Forest* contain?
4. Compare how the whites and Indians live in relation to nature. Give specific examples of the differences and similarities.
5. True Son frequently speaks of feeling like a prisoner when he is among the whites. Describe the number of ways that True Son feels confined by white culture.
6. What is the significance of the massacre of the Conestogo Indians to True Son? Compare how the Indians treat True Son, a white boy who lives among them, to how the whites treat the Conestogo. Why do you think there is a difference?
7. Has True Son changed by the end of the story? If so, in what ways? If not, how is he the same?
8. What does *The Light in the Forest* teach you about the history of how white settlers have treated Native Americans?
9. Consider the issue of racism in regards to *The Light in the Forest*. Find examples of racial slurs referring to either side, stereotypical attitudes, and violent crimes committed solely because of the victim's ethnicity.
10. Consider what you know about modern Native American communities, or do some research on them. Compare them to the Native American communities depicted in the story.
11. Consider the time True Son and Half Arrow spend living on their own in the forest. Why is this time so enjoyable to them? How does it relate to the happy memory Bejance shares with True Son and his repeated message to the boy?
12. What factors lead to True Son's betrayal of his Indian comrades? Do you think True Son made the right decision by warning the people on the boat? Why or why not?
13. Are you satisfied with the ending to the story? Is so, why? If not, why and how would you have liked to see the story end?

The Light in the Forest

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

affronted – insulted, especially face-to-face
aversion – a feeling of repugnance toward something
redoubts – small, usually temporary, military defense barriers
sapling – a young tree
squaws – slang for Indian women

1. How does the boy's father prepare him for hardship?

2. How long had the boy been living among the Indians and why was he taken? How did his father make him a true Indian?

Chapter 7

VOCABULARY

abhorrence – hatred; loathing
bolster – a long pillow or cushion
crockery – ceramic pottery made of clay
derision – ridicule or scorn
gaol – a jail
kit – animal cub; baby

1. Why does True Son believe the white men are pale?

2. Summarize the “Peshtank Story” that True Son has heard. What does this tell you about the relationship between the whites and the Indians?

3. What does True Son’s Indian father note is the difference between how Indians handle prisoners who like them and how whites handle them?

4. What are the three ways that True Son feels he has been imprisoned?

Chapter 10

VOCABULARY

aboriginal – first or earliest known of its kind
brusque – short and abrupt
gallipot – a small ceramic pot
miasma – a corrupting atmosphere
remuneration – pay; recompense

1. Why is Dr. Childsley unwilling to specifically diagnose Johnny's fever?

2. What is the burden that Harry has long carried in his mind? Find a statement relating to Harry that shows the general prejudice about other races.

3. Why does Aunt Kate return Johnny/True Son's Indian dress?

4. What does Parson Elder's son tell Harry?

4. How long do the boys live in the forest? What do they spend their time doing?

5. Why do they move from their forest paradise?

6. How does Cuyloga greet True Son?
