

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Charley Skedaddle by Patricia Beatty

Book Information

Patricia Beatty, Charley Skedaddle

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Interest Level: MG

During the Civil War, a twelve-year-old Bowery Boy from New York City joins the Union Army as a drummer, deserts during a battle in Virginia, and encounters an old mountain woman.

Award: Scott O'Dell Award

Topics: Adventure, Escape; Adventure, Runaway; Community Life, Violence; Wars, American Civil War

Main Characters

Charles Stephen Quinn (Charley Skedaddle) the twelve-year-old boy who runs off to join the army like his deceased brother Johnny; Charley deserts in the middle of a battle but later proves his bravery by shooting a panther and rescuing Granny Bent

Cois MacRae a mountain boy who continues a family feud against the Bents by attacking Charley; he gains admiration for Charley after Charley kills a panther

Con Sullivan the soldier who fought at Gettysburg with Johnny and lets Charley join with the regiment in New York; Charley later realizes that Con is a drunk and a gambler who probably stole Johnny's knife

Granny Jerusha Bent the pragmatic wise woman who keeps Charley at her farm after she catches him trying to steal eggs from her henhouse; she delivers babies and makes medicine for sick people

Isaac Bent Granny's late husband, who was part of the Underground Railroad

Jacob Hodder the father of the baby that Granny helps to deliver

Jem Miller the kind Union soldier who watches over Charley; Charley sees Jem get killed in battle and uses Jem's musket to shoot a Rebel soldier

John Francis Quinn (Johnny) the older brother of Charley, who was killed at Gettysburg; Charley idolizes Johnny and carries the watch he inherited from him

Major Caswell the officer who assigns Charley to be a drummer and warns Charley not to fight any members of the Dead Rabbits gang

Michael Demarest Noreen's domineering fiancé, who suggests sending Charley to an orphanage if Charley does not stop fighting

Noreen Quinn Charley's gentle older sister, who has taken care of him since their parents died; she is upset by Charley's fighting and listens to her fiancé's suggestion that Charley be sent to an orphanage

Sarie Giffen the pretty young mountain girl who comes to Granny's cabin; Charley beats up Cois for offending her

Silas Gorman the drummer who leaves his position to become a soldier and teaches Charley to drum; he is wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness

Thad Porter an African-American Union soldier who knows Granny from her days as part of the Underground Railroad; Thad risks his life to come visit Granny

the Confederate officer the officer who lets Charley escape after Charley is captured by the Confederate Army; the officer does not want to send a boy to Andersonville Prison

the Metropolitan the policeman who stops Charley's fight with a Dead Rabbit gang member and makes sure Charley gets home safely

Tom Bailey a member of the Dead Rabbit gang whom Charley fights in an alley

Vocabulary

emancipated freed

gawked stared at

hamlets small towns

incorrigible refusing to behave well

melancholy sad, depressed

skedaddle to flee

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Synopsis

In New York City in 1864, a Bowery Boy, Charley Quinn, is ready to fight when a member of the Dead Rabbit gang challenges him. A policeman cuts the fight short and takes Charley home. That night Charley overhears Noreen, his older sister and guardian, discussing with her fiancé the possibility of sending Charley to an orphanage. Defying his sister's orders to stay inside that night, Charley goes looking for his gang. Instead, he finds the regiment of his deceased brother, Johnny, parading down the street. When one of the Union soldiers greets Charley, Charley recognizes him as Johnny's friend, Con Sullivan, and Charley begs Con to take him with him. Con agrees despite the objections of Jem Miller, a fellow soldier.

On the transport boat, Jem watches over Charley while Con is drunk. Charley becomes upset that Con had first acted friendly but now totally ignores him. Just before landing in Virginia, Charley recognizes Con's knife as Johnny's knife and is upset. Con claims that he won the knife from Johnny, but Charley does not believe him -- he thinks Con stole it from Johnny. All the soldiers disembark from the ship, but Charley waits until a sergeant finds him. The sergeant takes Charley to Major Caswell, who tells Charley that he is only old enough to be a drummer.

In Culpeper, Charley is sent to train with Silas Gorman, a drummer who will soon become a soldier. Charley learns quickly, and Jem gives Charley advice as the soldiers prepare for the next battle. While marching, the soldiers enter the Wilderness, an isolated and overgrown area of Virginia, and attack the Confederates. Charley sees Jem get shot and uses Jem's musket to shoot a Rebel. Horrified, thinking that he has killed a man, Charley runs. He does not stop even when he sees Gorman, who has been wounded. Charley is deeply shamed that he has "skedaddled," or run from battle, and now thinks of himself as a coward.

The next day a Rebel captures Charley. Charley tells him his name is "Charley Skedaddle," and

Charley is taken to an officer who balks at sending a young boy to Andersonville Prison. The officer tells Charley to hide in the brush and then run west. After the Rebels leave, Charley hitches a ride on a wagon with an old man who takes Charley near the Blue Ridge Mountains.

As Charley is traveling on foot again, a group of Confederates scare Charley off the road. He finds a farm and tries to steal some eggs, but a goose honks and alerts the owner, an old woman named Granny Jerusha Bent. Granny Bent tells Charley that he must stay and work for her, partly because the mountains are too dangerous for a Yankee deserter and partly because she needs help with her work. Granny is known for her ability to heal with herbs and is regarded by the locals as a kind of witch doctor. She has many secrets, including what her husband did before the Bents moved away to Franklin. Granny returned to the hills after her husband died. Granny warns Charley that he will probably have to fight Cois MacRae, a mountain boy whose family has a feud with the Bent family.

One day Granny takes Charley to town, and Cois beats up Charley by using wrestling instead of boxing, the style of fighting Charley used in New York. Later, Charley meets the pretty Sarie Giffen when Sarie requests Granny's birthing services for her sister. Before Granny goes to help, she locks Charley in the henhouse so he cannot run away. He remains there until she returns early the next morning.

At the end of the month, Granny gets another call and locks Charley up again. This time, Charley removes some rotten boards and runs off, but a mountaineer thinks Charley is lost and returns Charley to Granny's cabin. On the last Sunday in July, Granny takes Charley to church. After the service Charley sees Cois whisper something embarrassing to Sarie. Charley successfully boxes Cois in retaliation.

In August, Granny locks Charley in the henhouse when she hears a strange whistle. Charley sneaks out and sees Granny greeting an African-American

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Union soldier. When the soldier leaves, Charley confronts Granny, who admits she and her husband were in the Underground Railroad. After Charley reveals how he had been escaping from the henhouse, she agrees not to lock him up anymore.

For Christmas, Charley gives Granny a whistle, and she makes him a ham dinner. Granny teaches Charley to shoot her old rifle. She also tells Charley about a panther that prowls the area. At the end of February, Granny goes to deliver the Hodder baby. While she is gone, the panther breaks into the henhouse. After two days, Charley is worried because Granny has not yet returned. He hears the panther at night, so he waits until morning to go looking for Granny. When Charley comes out, the panther jumps off the roof. Charley shoots it and goes to the Hodder house, where he is informed that Granny had left two days before, so Charley searches and finds Granny at the bottom of a ravine. To get to her, Charley must make Granny's mule cross a swollen creek. Charley blindfolds the mule and forces him across. When Charley is knocked in the water, the watch he inherited from Johnny is ruined, but Charley manages to save Granny.

Granny is amazed at Charley's courage when she sees the dead panther. When the neighbors come to visit, Granny tells everyone of Charley's bravery. In April, news comes that the armies are heading to the hills and Charley has to continue west even though he is sad to leave Granny.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Charley stop talking to strangers when he starts living with Granny Bent?

The mountain community is a very isolated community, and the people are suspicious of outsiders, especially during the war. Charley has a very distinct New York accent when he first comes to live with Granny. If the mountaineers hear him, they might recognize that he is a Yankee deserter and kill him. Charley realizes he should keep quiet, and Granny Bent also tells Charley not to speak and give himself away.

Literary Analysis

What features of the Wilderness made it a difficult place for the Union Army to fight the Confederate Army?

In the first place, the entire region was unfamiliar to most of the Union soldiers. The Wilderness was problematic because it was full of dense underbrush and trees that made it difficult to keep an army together and hard for an army to see what was happening. The terrain of the Wilderness all looked the same, so it was difficult for soldiers to figure out where they were. The area also provided ample cover for sharpshooters in the Confederate Army, who were more familiar with the region. In fact, the Confederate Army had created breastworks prior to the arrival of the Union Army. Added to all these problems was the fact that the men hated and feared the place because many men had been lost nearby at the battle at Chancellorsville.

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Inferential Comprehension

What can the reader assume about Thad Porter after Granny Bent tells Charley that she and her husband, Isaac, had been part of the Underground Railroad?

Thad was probably once a slave who traveled with his sister through the Underground Railroad. He spent enough time with Granny to have formed a relationship with her, and he was successful in escaping the South. He also is very grateful to Granny for what she did for him and is probably fighting for the Union Army in the hopes of ending slavery forever.

Constructing Meaning

How can the reader tell that Granny Bent has grown fond of Charley by the time he leaves?

When Charley gives Granny the whistle, she is touched. When Charley offers her his money, she refuses to accept it but says that Charley is good to offer it to her. When Charley saves her and shoots the panther, she tells him he is brave. When Charley tells her what happened to him in the Battle of the Wilderness, she comforts Charley by letting him know that he probably did not kill the Rebel. She also keeps telling the visiting neighbors how good Charley is. Finally, when Charley is threatened by the possible approach of the armies, Granny insists Charley go west for his own safety, but she asks him to write to her and lets him know he is welcome to return.

about where he is. Have the students examine maps and try to trace Charley's journey. If possible, have the students look at Civil War maps that are labeled with the names and locations of battles and troop movements.

Comparing and Contrasting Charley goes through many changes in this story. Have the students write a paper showing in what ways Charley changes and what ways he remains the same as the story progresses.

Making Predictions Charley takes great pride in belonging to the Bowery Boys gang. What appeals to him about being a member of the gang, and how has his experience in the war affected his need for his gang's approval? Have students consider this question and write a brief story about how Charley would probably act if he returned to New York City and encountered members of his gang.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Charley's perception of war after the battle is much different from what it was before the battle. Have the students find and read first-hand accounts of soldiers of the Civil War, particularly accounts of the battles mentioned in this story. Have them discuss whether the accounts of the battles seem to validate Charley's experiences as described in this book.

Recognizing Setting Although Charley travels a long way in this story, he often seems unsure