

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

George Washington's Socks

by
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Book Information

Elvira Woodruff, George Washington's Socks

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Book Level: 5.0

Interest Level: MG

Five kids on a lakeside camp-out are transported back to the time of George Washington.

Topics: Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Science Fiction, Time Travel; Wars, American Revolutionary War

Main Characters

Gustav a Hessian soldier who, along with two others, captures the children

Hooter (Brian Melrose) a big, strong member of the adventure club with a very soft heart, whose nickname comes from his rescue of an injured owl

Israel Gates a rebel soldier who befriends Matt and who dies on the march to Trenton from the combined effects of an injury, respiratory disease and exposure to cold

Katie Matt's younger sister, who tags along on the adventure club's first adventure

Matt the ten year-old leader of an adventure club formed to study historic events

Mr. and Mrs. Hornbee rebel sympathizers who rescue Matt from the cold and loan him their mule

Quentin, nicknamed Q an adventure club member who is known for his quick thinking

Tony a member of the club characterized by his small size

Vocabulary

artillery guns, particularly large guns like cannons

currency any form of money

Patriot a person fighting for independence from the king, or a person loyal to his/her country

Tory a person loyal to King George during the Revolutionary War period

Synopsis

Matthew Carlton (Matt) and friends Hooter, Q and Tony form a club to study adventures in history. During their first official club camp-out, they talk about Washington crossing the Delaware during the American Revolutionary War. While on a hike during the camp-out, the children, including Matt's little sister Katie, find a rowboat that takes them back in time and allows them to participate in the actual event.

During their adventure, the children experience the hardships of the Continental Army soldiers, interact with local Indian boys and meet and befriend a rebel soldier, Israel Gates, and a Hessian soldier, Gustav. Israel dies of disease, deprivation and cold, which characterize the conditions faced by rebel soldiers. Gustav is killed by rebel soldiers shortly after saving Katie from thin ice.

The author describes through the eyes of contemporary ten year-olds both the conditions under which the Revolution was fought and the variety of individuals who participated in the conflict. The details serve to enlighten readers about specific aspects of a particular battle, while generalizing about the Revolutionary War, its historical setting and the institution of war itself. By inserting contemporary youngsters into the past, the author is able to contrast modern peacetime with colonial wartime.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

What does Hooter mean when he asks, "Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys?"

The rebels who kill Gustav are fighting for their country, but do not recognize Gustav's humanity. Gustav, however, is the enemy, but risks his life to save Katie, the sister of rebel supporters. This confuses Hooter and makes him question simple definitions of good and bad.

Literary Analysis

Does Matt's attitude toward war change toward the end of the adventure?

Yes. He seems to discover that soldiers on both sides are human beings and that each side includes good as well as bad individuals.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare and contrast Matt and Israel's interests in the Revolutionary War.

Both are young men--nearly boys. Matt is interested from a distance and knows the outcome results in the establishment of the USA. Israel is fighting to earn money to feed his family.

Constructing Meaning

The author of a story sometimes includes material that expresses a point of view. Identify scenes in this story that reveal a point of view about war. What do you think the author is saying about war?

As the author writes about Gustav, she shows him to be a very likable person. In revealing his humanity further, as he risks his life to save Katie, the children forget his title of "enemy" and exchange it for "person." Gustav's death as well as Israel's death lead to Matt and Hooter's declaration about hating war. The author's message seems to be that death on either side is tragic.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Have students find or make a map of the thirteen colonies that were at war

with the British when this story took place. Instruct them to draw a rectangle around the area represented by the map in the front of this book, and on a copy of the map in the book, to trace the paths taken by the history club members and mark where each of their adventures takes place. Students could place a number on the map and describe the event there on a separate paper.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors As Matt and his friends witness Washington's crossing of the Delaware and events before and after the battle of Trenton, they recognize several historically important characters, starting with General Washington and John Glover. Other characters, such as the Hessian soldiers and Mr. Hornbee, were fictitious characters included to represent people who are involved in the battle. Have students list the characters the author describes, both historic and representative, and write a brief paragraph discussing the variety of reasons each one finds him/herself involved in the conflict.

Comparing and Contrasting Matt and his friends are transported back in time by the author to be eyewitnesses to events surrounding Washington's crossing of the Delaware and the battle of Trenton during the American Revolutionary War. During the course of the story, the children and their Revolutionary War acquaintances observe differences in speech, clothing and lifestyle that contrast the two time periods. Have the students discuss the differences the children observe and add, where possible, additional differences the readers notice that may not be emphasized by the author.

Responding to Literature The author has attempted to bring the events surrounding Washington's crossing of the Delaware and the battle of Trenton to life for young people. Find a historical description of those events similar to the one the history club uses to introduce this adventure. Have the students identify in writing or a discussion group the aspects of the historical account that are included by the author of the adventure. Does the historical account mention George Washington's socks?