

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Heidi (Unabridged) by Johanna Spyri

Book Information

Johanna Spyri, Heidi (Unabridged)

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295 Pages

Book Level: 8.2

Interest Level: MG

An orphan sent to live with her grandfather learns to love both the old man and the Swiss Alps and becomes homesick when she goes to the city to be a companion to an invalid.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Countries/Regions, Switzerland; Natural Environments, Mountains; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Clara a young invalid who becomes one of Heidi's dearest friends

Detie Heidi's aunt, who gives her to Uncle Alp to raise

Dr Clossen Clara's physician, who becomes a great friend of Heidi

Grandmamma Clara's grandmother, who helps to guide Heidi to an understanding of God

Grannie Peter's grandmother, who enjoys Heidi's visits immensely

Heidi a young orphan girl who helps heal others with her kind spirit

Miss Rottenmeier Clara's caretaker, who is not fond of Heidi

Mr Sesemann Clara's father, who allows Heidi to go home

Peter a young goat herder who is jealous of Heidi's new friends

Sebastian a servant in Clara's home who helps Heidi hide her kittens

Uncle Alp Heidi's grandfather, who has lived as a hermit for many years

Vocabulary

hermit a person who withdraws from society

porter a person employed to carry luggage

solitary living without the company of others

torment great physical pain or mental anguish

Synopsis

The story begins with the journey of a five-year-old girl and Detie, her aunt, to Uncle Alp's hut where the young girl, Heidi, will be staying. Detie has watched over Heidi for the first several years of her life after her parents died. Now Detie wishes to leave the girl with her grandfather, Uncle Alp, who lives a solitary life in the Swiss mountains.

The people of Dorfli, the village below the hut, are stunned to learn that Heidi will live with Uncle Alp. He has gained a reputation for being angry and hostile to God and fellow humans. He is actually quite kind and gentle to Heidi, though. Heidi spends a few years on the mountain with her grandfather. She learns the way of the mountain and becomes friends with a local goat herder, Peter. She spends many afternoons with Peter's blind grandmother and her nights in her warm hay bed in the loft of the hut. Heidi and her grandfather become quite close during these years.

Then Detie returns to the mountain to bring Heidi to Frankfurt where she is to be a companion to an invalid girl, Clara. Uncle Alp and Heidi protest, but Detie insists. Heidi travels to Frankfurt where she becomes a good friend to Clara. Heidi learns to read from Clara's grandmother and has many adventures that annoy Miss Rottenmeier, the caretaker. When the servants of the house think there is a ghost, Mr Sesemann, Clara's father, who is away on business, returns with Dr Clossen, a family friend, to capture the ghost. The ghost turns out to be Heidi, who is sleepwalking. The doctor explains to Mr Sesemann that Heidi is wasting away from homesickness and must be returned to her grandfather.

Heidi returns to the mountain, which pleases her grandfather very much. Heidi plays with her goats and awaits her visit from Clara. In the meantime, Heidi reads the story of the prodigal son to her grandfather. He is so moved by the story that he

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makes peace with God and decides to join the community again. Clara is too ill to visit Heidi, so the doctor visits in her place. During his visit to the mountain, the doctor expresses the grief he feels over his daughter, who had recently died. He feels much better after his visit and promises to return soon.

The next winter, Uncle Alp moves Heidi into town so she can be closer to school. During this time, Heidi teaches Peter how to read. Soon, Clara and her grandmother visit the mountain. Uncle Alp promises to help Clara regain her strength. He feeds her goat milk, and Heidi takes her outdoors for sunshine and exercise. Peter becomes jealous of Heidi's new friend and destroys Clara's wheelchair. By that time, however, Clara is almost ready to walk. Her grandmother visits and excitedly writes to Mr Sesemann about the miracle. Just as Peter is bringing the message down the mountain, Mr Sesemann is climbing up the mountain. He comes over the hill to see his daughter learning to walk.

Soon Clara must return to Frankfurt, but she promises to visit. The Sesemanns thank Uncle Alp and Heidi profusely for all of their help. The doctor decides to live on in the region. He and Uncle Alp divide the winter home in the village. As the book ends, the doctor and Uncle Alp discuss Heidi's future and how both men will always care for her.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Grandmamma gives a book to Heidi. Why is this book important to Heidi?

The book contains a picture and a story about a goat herder that reminds her of Peter. Whenever she is lonely for her home in the mountains, she can turn to those pages and daydream. The book is also important to Heidi when she learns to read. She is surprised that what she thought was such a daunting task is not difficult. The more she learns to read, the more the book grows in meaning. She keeps it under her pillow at night so she will never lose it.

Literary Analysis

What insight into human nature do we gain from *Heidi*?

Students may answer that the book illustrates the human need for companionship. Everyone in the book who is sick seems to feel better when they are in the company of Heidi. Clara feels sick and lonely without Heidi's company. She becomes well on the mountain with Heidi and Uncle Alp. Uncle Alp is a solitary man until Heidi comes into his home. The doctor is feeling sick and lonely after the death of his child, yet his visit to the mountain with Heidi makes him feel much better. In addition, Grannie always feels much better after Heidi's visits. Another insight gained by this novel is the human need to be in touch with nature. Heidi wastes away without her fresh mountain air. Clara becomes well after her stay on the mountain. Even Dr Clossen, with all of his medicines, feels better after his visit to the mountain.

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Inferential Comprehension

Explain how Uncle Alp changes between the beginning and the end of the book. How do his beliefs, personality, and outlook on life change? How do these aspects stay the same?

In the beginning of the book, Uncle Alp is a hermit. He rarely sees anyone from town and stays in his hut most of the time. After Heidi comes to live with him, however, Uncle Alp begins to soften. He is never cruel with Heidi; in fact, he is quite the opposite. Uncle Alp also becomes a father figure to Peter throughout the course of the novel. When Heidi must leave him to live in Frankfurt, Uncle Alp becomes a solitary man again. When Heidi returns, he is happy to see her. Heidi reads him the story of the prodigal son and Uncle Alp makes his peace with God. He decides to bring Heidi to church and become part of the community again. By the end of the novel, Uncle Alp is a good host to many visitors, as well as a nurse to Clara.

Constructing Meaning

Which character in *Heidi* is your favorite? Why?

Students will have varied responses. One possible answer is the character Heidi. Heidi is a very caring and loving young girl. She is helpful and considerate. Students may see themselves in the way she cares for her family and friends. Also, students may especially enjoy Uncle Alp and Grandmamma for their wisdom.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Much of *Heidi* takes place in the Swiss Alps. Ask your students to locate them on a map. Then have them compare the location of their home city to Heidi's home.

Making Predictions *Heidi* is a story filled with twists, turns, obstacles, and unexpected events. Ask your students to keep a journal as they read *Heidi*. Have them record their predictions about the story. Also, ask them to record the actual outcome of their predictions. How accurate were they? Did they pay close attention to details?

Recognizing Feelings The characters in *Heidi* are often alone. Ask your students to think about a time when they were alone for an extended period of time. How did they feel? Have them list several of those emotions and then discuss why some of the characters in the novel may have felt the same way.

Understanding the Main Idea One of the main themes in *Heidi* involves communing with nature. For example, throughout the novel, the mountain air heals several characters. Ask students to choose a play, book, poem, or movie that has a theme related to this novel. Have them explain to the class how the two are related.