

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Light in the Forest

by
Conrad Richter

Book Information

Conrad Richter, The Light in the Forest

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120 Pages

Book Level: 5.5

Interest Level: MG

A four-year-old white boy is adopted into an Indian warrior tribe.

Topics: Adventure, Life Changes; Adventure, Survival; People, Native American; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Onward and Upward: Change

Main Characters

Cuyloga the Indian father of True Son, who adopted True Son after the death of his own son

Gordon Butler True Son's little brother and the only white character who accepts True Son's Indian background

Half Arrow the cousin and loyal best friend of True Son

Little Crane tribal member who is forced to give up his white wife

Mr. and Mrs. Butler the biological parents of True Son, who are unable to form a close bond with their son

Thitpan angry brother of Little Crane, who declares war on the whites to avenge Little Crane's death

True Son the principal character of the story, a fifteen-year-old white boy who is returned to his white mother and father after being captured and raised by Indians

Uncle Wilse True Son's uncle who hates all Indians and had participated in the massacre of the Conestogo tribe that wanted to live peacefully with the whites

Vocabulary

aloof distant, especially in one's relations with other people; indifferent

dugout a boat or canoe made by hollowing out a log

pliable receptive to change; easily influenced

Yengwe the Delaware term for something that is of the white people

Synopsis

True Son is a fifteen-year-old boy who has been living with the Lenni Lenape tribe since his capture when he was four years old. True Son loves his Indian father, Cuyloga, and considers himself to be a true-blooded Indian. As part of a treaty, the Indians agree to release all of their white "prisoners." True Son is shocked to discover he is one of them. Angry and filled with hatred for the white people, True Son is taken from the Indian village in Ohio to his parents' home in Pennsylvania.

True Son hates his new home, his new clothes, and the way of life that is a prison to him compared with the freedom of Indian life. He sees his white relatives' hatred of Indians, and forms a bond only with his brother Gordon. True Son and his white relatives justify their hatred of each other by the violent acts committed against their people. As time passes, True Son's opinion of the white way of life does not change.

Almost a year after True Son arrived, Half Arrow and Little Crane mistakenly look for him at Uncle Wilse's home. To be friendly, Little Crane tells stories that he considers humorous. Uncle Wilse thinks they are degrading to whites. He kills and scalps Little Crane after the two Indians leave. True Son and Half Arrow confront Uncle Wilse and attempt to scalp him. They flee when help arrives for Uncle Wilse, and they travel back to the Indian village.

The family of Little Crane declares war on whites, and True Son and Half Arrow join the war party. Two events cause the tribe to question True Son's loyalties to the tribe. First, True Son expresses his disapproval when members of the party return with the scalp of a child. Then, True Son warns a boat of white people of an Indian ambush when he sees a boy Gordon's age.

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The warring party tries True Son for betraying them. Cuyloga persuades the party not to burn True Son. As punishment, True Son must leave the Indian's land. Cuyloga tells him he is neither an Indian nor his son, and warns him never to return. The story closes with True Son looking at the road to the white people where "men chose to be slaves to their own or another's property and followed empty and desolate lives far from the wild beloved freedom of the Indian."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

If True Son had never been captured by the Indians, what do you think his opinion of them would be? Why would he feel this way?

True Son would probably hate the Indians. Without the experience of living with the tribe, True Son would not understand and appreciate the good parts of their way of life. His opinion of them would be shaped by the stories and opinions of his elders. He would probably believe the bad experiences with the Indians reflected typical Indian behavior. He would not understand their side of the story.

Literary Analysis

Why did the author choose the name True Son?

The name was used to make the reader question who True Son's father was and to show how True Son was caught between the Indian and white cultures. At the beginning, he was wanted and loved by his biological white father and his adoptive Indian father. They both struggled to claim him as their own. By the end of the book, True Son is rejected by his Indian father. It is likely the society of his white father would not accept him either. In the end, he had no "father" at all.

Inferential Comprehension

Half Arrow danced and chanted in triumph when he realized True Son would go with him to the Indian village. When True Son cautioned him to be quiet, Half Arrow said that white people "can hear only the war whoop and the money rattles." What did Half Arrow mean?

Half Arrow was expressing his anger that the white people did not acknowledge or even see the good in the Indians. They saw Indians only as people who fought with them or traded with them.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the book, True Son planned to return to the white people. How do we know this?

True Son's journey is compared with the last time he was sent to live with the white people. At the end of the book, the author writes, "Then as today he was made against his will to take up his life among the white people." The end of the book shows True Son looking at the road leading to the white people.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story takes place in the mid 1700s when white settlers moved westward into Native American territory. The Lenape or Delaware tribe originally was located in Delaware. They moved westward as they sold their land or were forced out of their land by white settlers. It may be useful to research the Delaware tribe and their movement westward. Also, students will find it interesting to trace True Son's journey from his Indian village in Ohio to the home of his white family in Pennsylvania. The Lenape village was located on the Tuscarawas river near the forks of the Muskingum. True Son traveled eastward, crossed the Ohio River and continued to Fort Pitt which is probably present-day Pittsburgh. He crossed the mountains and continued to Carlisle, PA where the white "captives" were returned to their family members. True Son left Carlisle on horseback with Del and his white father. They crossed the Susquehanna River just south of Paxton by ferry, then traveled to Paxton. Paxton

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was the home of True Son's white family, and the birthplace of his Indian father. Paxton is probably present-day Paxtonia. Point out that while True Son is a fictional character, many returned white captives did run away from their white families to return to their Indian families and the Indian way of life.

Understanding Literary Features At the end of the book, True Son stood before the road of the whites that led to where "men chose to be slaves to their own or another's property and followed empty and desolate lives far from the wild beloved freedom of the Indian." The author is expressing his belief that the white people were too busy acquiring and maintaining belongings to fully enjoy and understand people or nature. The reserved lifestyle of the white settlers restricted their freedoms as well. Ask the students to identify other parts of the book that express this opinion. Talk about the societal changes that have occurred since the mid 1700s. Which changes or inventions have made people more like slaves? Which changes or inventions have freed people to enjoy life and each other?

Recognizing Feelings The Lenape and the white settlers each believed they were in the right and the other group was violent, savage, responsible for the conflict between them and could not be trusted. Ask the students to try to see the situation from both sides. They could make a list of the reasons the white settlers hated the Indians and thought they were at fault. They should make a similar list citing the Indians' reasons. Talk with students about how groups have their own perspective on a problem. Discuss the dangers of judging a group by the actions of a few members. Ask if they had personal experiences for conflicts that were caused or perpetuated by failure to see the situation from the other person's point of view.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The author gives many examples of the descriptive language of the Lenape tribe. Ask the students to look for examples of this language in the book. Students could make up their own descriptive names for common objects, places, or feelings. The Lenape

named their months according to what they saw during that time of year. Some of their months included the following: the Month of the First Snow, the Month when the Cold Breaks Trees, the Month When the First Frog Croaks, The Month when the Deer Turns Red, and the Honey Bee Month. Ask the students to make-up their own descriptive names for the months. These names do not need to be descriptions of nature. Students should be encouraged to choose names that are not ordinary or obvious.