

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

My Heart Is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl

by
Ann Rinaldi

Book Information

Ann Rinaldi, My Heart Is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, a Sioux Girl

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Interest Level: MG

In the diary account of her life at a government-run Pennsylvania boarding school in 1880, a twelve-year-old Sioux Indian girl reveals a great need to find a way to help her people.

Award: Misc./Other

Topics: Community Life, Helping Others; Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction (All); History, Frontier/Pioneer Life; People, Native American; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Series, Dear America

Main Characters

Belle Rain Water a jealous and embittered Indian girl at the school who undergoes a change of heart

Black Cloud Nannie Little Rose's grandfather

Charles Tackett Red Road's husband

Conrad Whiteshield (Charles) Nannie Little Rose's rebellious older brother

Goodbird Nannie Little Rose's jealous mother

Mr. Captain Pratt the founder of the Carlisle Indian School

Mr. Graystone, Miss Monk, and Miss Rosecrans teachers at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania

Mrs. Cafrey (Woman-Who-Screams-A-Lot) the school cook and cooking teacher

Mrs. Campbell the kind-hearted English teacher at the Indian school

Nannie Little Rose the principal character of the story; a twelve-year-old Lakota Sioux girl who is brought to an Indian school in Pennsylvania; she accepts this as her vision quest and plans to do a brave act to make her people proud

Pretty Eagle Nannie Little Rose's closest friend; she is a gentle, warm, and compassionate girl who claims her fainting spells are trances

Red Road an eighteen-year-old Sioux woman, daughter of Spotted Tail and good friend of Nannie Little Rose; she serves as a translator for White/Indian interactions at the school

Spotted Tail chief of the Lakota tribe of the Sioux

Stands Firm White Thunder's second wife

White Thunder Nannie Little Rose's father

Vocabulary

counted coup touched an enemy with a lance

deplorable horribly bad; needing severe correction

impudent boldly argumentative; sassy

pallet a hard narrow bed

scrofula a type of tuberculosis affecting the lymph nodes

Synopsis

Little Rose has been asked by her teacher, Mrs. Campbell, to keep a diary. Her teacher has singled her out for her language skills and learning ability. The teachers hope she will serve as "A-Friend-To-Go-Between-Us" for the school staff and other Indian students at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Little Rose reflects in the diary on her tribe and her journey to the school. Her tribe had been recently relocated when gold was discovered in the Black Hills. The Indian way of life was quickly being lost as the government took away their land and natural food supply and forced them to live on reservations and rations. Little Rose's father, White Thunder, was one of the few tribal members who tried to hold on to traditions. Whiteshield, Little Rose's older brother, had always hoped to be a warrior.

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When the opportunity came for them to go to Pennsylvania, both were reluctant. However, their grandfather encouraged it, and Little Rose's father sent both Whiteshield and Little Rose to the school. Before leaving, White Thunder told Little Rose that this journey was her "vision quest," and that she should perform an act of bravery and return to tell him about it. Once the children arrived at the school, they were stripped of all their tribal belongings, their hair was cut, and they were made to wear "citizens' clothing" and choose other names. Little Rose chose Nannie; Whiteshield chose Conrad but later changes it to Charles.

Nannie writes of her daily experiences. She is grateful for the presence of Red Road, an older girl from her tribe, who was to be Nannie's father's second wife until Nannie's mother objected. Nannie is a quick learner and is favored by some teachers. This, along with Nannie's beauty, angers Belle Rain Water, a Hopi girl in the dormitory who tries to get Nannie in trouble. Nannie is worried she will bring dishonor to her people. She is also concerned about her brother, who is rebellious and gets put into the guardhouse for his behavior. She longs for the day Pretty Eagle, her best friend from home, will join her at the school. Pretty Eagle had been left behind because she suffered from fainting sickness and was too weak to travel.

As the school year progresses, the children learn about the various holidays the white people celebrate. They also mourn the deaths of the children who die of tuberculosis and pneumonia. Pretty Eagle arrives, and Nannie's spirits brighten. Pretty Eagle confides to Nannie that her fainting spells are really trances and that she has found her spirit helper. Nannie is jealous since she is still seeking her spirit helper. Nannie eventually finds her spirit helper in a mouse. Belle Rain Water notices Nannie feeding the mouse, reports it to the cook, and then kills it.

The mouse still visits Nannie in her dreams, where it is revealed her brave act will be to care for Pretty Eagle in her sickness. This Nannie does faithfully until the day of a field trip to the Luray Caverns in

Virginia. Mr. Captain Pratt insists that Nannie go. Pretty Eagle leaves a note for Nannie before she leaves saying she may have a lengthy trance and not to worry. Belle intercepts the note and does not give it Nannie. On the trip Nannie is in anguish because she did not want to leave while Pretty Eagle was sick. After two days she returns and learns Pretty Eagle has died and been buried. She slashes herself and cuts her hair in the Sioux tradition for mourning, but Belle stops her from slashing her face. When the content of the note is revealed, Nannie is filled with guilt when she realizes Pretty Eagle was probably buried alive. Belle is remorseful, but Nannie will not forgive her.

Nannie is also worried about her brother, Whiteshield, who has run away from the school. In a dream her mouse helper appears and tells her to forgive Belle and to watch for her brother's return. Later, Nannie overhears Mr. Captain Pratt, the schoolmaster, talking of an Indian at the railroad station. Knowing it is her brother, she asks permission to get him. The schoolmaster refuses because Nannie is too young to manage the horse and wagon alone. She then swallows her pride and asks Belle to accompany her, which Belle readily does.

While Nannie still misses Pretty Eagle, she and Belle, whom Nannie has forgiven, put flowers on Pretty Eagle's grave. Whiteshield has reformed and is committed to learning. After a brief visit home, Nannie continues in her pursuit of an advanced education so she can become a teacher.

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

Why are the children forced to give up their clothing and have their hair cut?

The Indians are considered "savages," and the administration of the school wishes to break them of their ties to their past. They feel that if the visible signs of Indian culture are removed, they will adopt the habits of the white world more quickly. There are probably at least two reasons why it was deemed necessary to destroy the Indians' culture and traditions. First, there was the extreme arrogance of the European settlers that their ways were superior. Second, there was perhaps some element of fear in the minds of the administration. Custer's Last Stand is mentioned, and perhaps an uprising is feared if the Indians are allowed to speak in their native tongue or keep their possessions.

Literary Analysis

What is the turning point in Belle Rain Water's life while at the Indian school?

The turning point occurs when Belle stops Nannie Little Rose from slashing her face with a knife. Belle has been angry, cold, and vindictive up to this point in the story. She wants to foil Nannie's fun and get her in trouble. Her heart is moved, however, when she sees Nannie in such anguish that she is about to destroy her pretty face, which Belle envies. Afterwards, it seems Belle is changed -- she is quiet, remorseful, and looks for an opportunity to talk with Nannie. She is patient when Nannie does not at first accept her apology. Later, she responds immediately when Nannie asks her for help.

Inferential Comprehension

Grandmother tells Nannie Little Rose, "what we *should* do, not what we *wish* to do, is the true road." How does this prove true for Little Rose?

Nannie Little Rose sometimes has to make choices that stem from duty rather than desire. She could go to a Quaker home in the summer and earn money, but instead she stays at the school to help Pretty Eagle. This decision allows Pretty Eagle to stay at the school when Spotted Tail returns and wants to take Pretty Eagle home. Little Rose is there to vouch she will watch over Pretty Eagle. Little Rose also takes on the playhouse project when she would have rather taught a child to read. She feels a sense of accomplishment when the project is complete, and she finds she has made a little girl very happy. Little Rose also comes out of mourning to rescue her brother from the railroad station. In doing so, she forgives Belle and releases her anger. This leads to reconciliation with both her brother and Belle.

Constructing Meaning

When the Native American children arrive at the school, they experience culture shock and feel disoriented and confused. Have you ever gone anywhere where you felt totally out of place? Describe your feelings and reactions.

Answers will vary. Students may relate an experience of visiting a different country or region or sharing a meal with people of a different culture. They may have found themselves among people who speak a different language. If they have not traveled far or been exposed to people of different cultures, perhaps they took a class or lesson in which everyone seemed to know or understand what was happening except them. Ensure that the students explain the feelings they were experiencing as they faced this new situation.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization

Native Americans had names that reflected important parts of their culture. The names expressed beauty, strength, bravery, speed, and nature. As

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an exercise in character observation, ask the students to give their classmates and family members names that reflect a personality trait or talent they have. These names should be respectful and reflect positive traits of the individual. The names should also reflect the things important in our current culture. For example, a person who is good with computers may be called "Computer Whiz," a person who scores a lot of soccer goals may be called "Sweet Foot," etc.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Children from many different tribes attend the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. As a class, list the various tribes mentioned in the story. Then divide the students into groups with each choosing a different tribe to study. Students can research the area of the country from which the tribe originated, the cultural practices of the tribe, the diet, dress, and homestyle of the tribal members, etc. The groups can then present their findings to the class as an oral report using pictures, posters, or models.

Responding to Literature The children who remain at the school during the summer months are not allowed to sit idle. They have to pick a project to complete by the end of summer. Ask the students to research and select a community or school service project. This can be done individually as a class project. A record can be kept of the hours of service involved and the type of work accomplished.

Recognizing Details Modern medicine has controlled or wiped out many communicable diseases that took a large toll on people of both European and Native American ancestry. Research the epidemiology of tuberculosis, scrofula, pneumonia, and smallpox. Why were the Native American children so susceptible to these diseases? What advances in curing or treating these diseases has occurred since the 1880s? Have any of these diseases been eliminated? Students should write a report on their findings.