

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Running out of Time

by

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Book Information

Margaret Peterson Haddix, Running out of Time

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Interest Level: MG

When a diphtheria epidemic hits her 1840s village, thirteen-year-old Jessie discovers it is actually a 1996 tourist site under the observation of heartless scientists, and it is up to Jessie to escape the village and save the lives of dying children.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults

Topics: Adventure, Escape; Community Life, Public Health; Diseases/Disorders, Communicable Diseases; Mysteries, Science Wonders; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 6-8 (Theme: Surviving); Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; U.S. States/Regions, Indiana

Main Characters

Dr. Fister the village's somewhat unusual doctor

Frank Lyle the man who impersonates Isaac Neeley and wants to kill Jessie

Hannah Jessie's older sister

Isaac Neeley the person Jessie is asked to contact outside Clifton for help

Jessie Keyser a thirteen-year-old girl who is asked by her mother to leave her village and time period to get help for the sick children

Katie Jessie's little sister, who becomes ill with diphtheria

Ma Keyser Jessie's mother, who provides some medical care to the villagers as a nurse/midwife

Miles Clifton the millionaire founder of Clifton

Mr. Smythe a teacher in the village

Mrs. Spurning a Clifton Village tour guide

Pa Keyser Jessie's father, who works as a blacksmith in the village

Vocabulary

bell-bottoms pants with flared leg bottoms

diphtheria a serious sickness of the throat accompanied by a high fever

quarantine isolate or segregate

silhouette outline

unethical something that is immoral or wrong

Synopsis

Jessie's life is turned upside down when she must leave her sheltered 1840s Indiana village. Her little sister and other village children have come down with diphtheria, and she is sent to get medical help.

Before sending Jessie off, her mother is forced to reveal a shocking secret that will change Jessie's life forever--their 1840s village is actually a historical preserve operating as a tourist attraction in 1996.

For Jessie, learning this startling news explains many of the mysteries concerning life in the village of Clifton. But it also creates an entirely new challenge for her--how to cope in a modern world where even the simplest invention is a confusing unknown.

On her trip to Indianapolis, Jessie must escape Clifton's guards and surveillance cameras by hiding inside the back of a bread truck. She later encounters two shady teenage boys who give her a hard time. She escapes their drunken advances and finally connects with the man her mother hopes will bring attention to Clifton's problem. Just when she begins to feel as though help is coming, Jessie overhears the man, who is really an imposter, planning to kill her. She runs off and cleverly gets help by calling a news conference at the capitol. Clifton's secret is revealed, and Jessie and her sister get the medicine they need to get well.

In the end, Jessie realizes she must face a modern life beyond the safety of Clifton's simple lifestyle. And because of her daring bravado, the reader can

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be confident that Jessie will indeed get along "okay."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

During Jessie's first taste of life in the 1990s, she encounters many hard-to-understand ideas or inventions. Describe some of the things that seem strange to Jessie.

Many "modern conveniences" seem miraculous to Jessie, such as flush toilets, electric lights, refrigerators, radio and television. She also finds many ideas hard to grasp, such as racial equality, the "disrespect" shown by teenagers to adults, and the reasons her own parents were considered "bad parents."

Literary Analysis

Many historical accounts of earlier life in America are written in a diary form, but this story was not. Take one event from the story and create a diary entry that Jessie might have made about that event.

An entry could be made regarding her feelings about learning her parents hadn't told her the truth about Clifton. Another entry could explore Jessie's encounter with the group of student tourists at Clifton Village.

Inferential Comprehension

This story points out some of the differences in how people lived in the 1800s as compared to the 1990s. Based on the story, discuss why you believe life in one period would be better than life in the other.

The discussion could center on the possible differences: medical care in the 1990s is better; jobs in the 1800s were less stressful; people were more concerned about their neighbors in the 1800s; children were more respectful in the 1800s.

Constructing Meaning

Put yourself in Miles Clifton's shoes. What argument would you make to persuade people your idea for an "authentic 1840s village" was good?

The village would be a "living history lesson" for today's students; the village's craftsmen would be preserving many crafts, such as blacksmithing, that might otherwise be forgotten.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot In this story, the main problem occurs when Clifton's children become sick with diphtheria. Do some research on this disease and how it is treated and prevented in the modern world. Or, rewrite this aspect of the story so that a different problem--one of your choice--causes life in Clifton to be compromised.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors One of the storylines of *Running out of Time* has to do with the change in lifestyles Jessie encounters when she leaves the 1840s Clifton village and enters the modern, urban setting of Indianapolis. Imagine that you are Jessie living in a small town in 1999--or so you've been led to believe. Create a brochure for a metropolis one hundred years in the future and write about the adjustments you might face if you suddenly found yourself living in it in the next century.

Comparing and Contrasting Miles Clifton was the creator/founder of this story's village of Clifton. It appears that he took great pains to create a truly authentic village of the 1840s era. In the real world, Walt Disney was a creator of historically correct villages. Do some research on Walt Disney and his creations; then, write a comparison/contrast paper telling how these two figures shared similar or dissimilar motivations or reasons for their "experiments."

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning When Jessie encounters new things, she describes them in terms familiar to her (a toilet is a white porcelain chair in an indoor outhouse). Make a list of modern inventions not mentioned in the story and describe them in terms Jessie might

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use--examples: a lawnmower--a metal goat that
eats grass; an escalator-- set of disappearing
stairs that lift you into the air.