

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Secret of the Andes

by

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Book Information

Ann Nolan Clark, Secret of the Andes
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An Indian boy who tends llamas in a hidden valley in Peru learns the traditions and secrets of his Inca ancestors.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Countries/Regions, Peru; People, Native American; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8

Main Characters

Amauta a teacher who has been ordered to complete Cusi's training in order to prepare Cusi to take Chuto's place

Chuto an Indian Old One who keeps a llama herd as a sacred trust; he raises Cusi to take his place as the guardian of the Incan heritage when he dies

Cusi a modern-day Inca boy who learns the ancient ways of his people and proves himself worthy to be entrusted with a secret

Keeper of the Fields an Old One whom Cusi meets on his return from Cuzco; he helps Cusi realize that Chuto is his true family

Misti Cusi's pet llama

the minstrel a traveler who keeps the ancient legends of the Inca past alive through song

Titu Cusi's father, who ran away from Chuto's strict rules

woman at the Ayllu city Cusi's mother

woman outside the Cuzco church Titu's mother

Year Father of the Ayllu an Old One who is the caretaker of the village of Ancient People

Vocabulary

<I>campesino</I> a peasant or farm worker in a Latin-American country

brine water containing large amounts of salt

centavo a Spanish unit of currency, a coin

frugally practicing economy or conservative use of resources

pampas a treeless grassland

sentinels guards

stealthily acting with secrecy to avoid notice

Synopsis

An Inca Indian boy, Cusi, and his mentor, an Old One named Chuto, live in Hidden Valley, high up in the Andes mountains of Peru tending a large flock of llamas. Cusi looks over a cliff in his isolated valley and spies a family far below. He has never seen other people before and calls to Chuto excitedly. Chuto decides it is time for Cusi to see the outside world. A minstrel comes to visit, sharing the songs of the Incas' past. He agrees to tend the flock while Chuto and Cusi are traveling, and they prepare for the journey to the Salt Pits. On the morning before they are to leave, Chuto takes Cusi to Sunrise Rock for the first time to greet the sun as it rises, an ancient ritual of the Incan people. Cusi senses the importance of this event as a sign of his growing up.

On the way to the Salt Pits, they travel by foot across a rope bridge and up a sheer cliff, testing Cusi's obedience and stamina. Cusi sees sights that amaze him, and he meets people of other cultures along the way. He is relieved when they arrive home to his familiar way of life, but he feels lonely since the minstrel left with his songs. Amauta, another Old One of Indian royalty, comes to complete Cusi's training in the history and ways of the Inca. Chuto protests that Cusi is too young, but Amauta says Cusi is ready, and he proceeds. After Amauta leaves, Cusi is restless, for even though he now knows Incan history, he does not know the history of his own family. He spends more and more time watching the family below him from the cliff and longs to become part of a family himself. Chuto decides the people below will be the family to receive this year's gift of llamas, and Cusi and he select a dozen from the herd. Chuto takes the llamas to them. Cusi, in the meantime, follows his pet llama, Misti, down a trail to a canyon where he

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finds a rock throne upon which he finds a pair of golden sandals. Knowing somehow that they belong to him, he takes them and returns home. He discovers that Chuto has returned from his trip. Chuto sees the sandals as the sign he has been waiting for and tells Cusi he should go alone the next day to the Holy City of Cuzco to find his heart's desire. Chuto had known that this would be the special day and had already loaded Cusi's llamas for the journey.

Cusi takes the llama trail down towards the family below but finds they have abandoned the camp. He is extremely disappointed, as he had expected them to become his adopted family. He vows to continue on to Cuzco, however. Coming to a fork in the trail, Misti leads him down a side trail where he finds an Ayllu, a city of the Ancient People, and meets a woman who feeds him and calls him "Son." Cusi gives the woman and Old One of the city five llamas before continuing on his journey. When he reaches the Holy City near nighttime, he is not allowed access into the city because of the llamas. An Indian who has been expecting him tells him he will come for him the next morning. The Indian escorts him through the city the next day, showing him many of the Incan artifacts that still remain in the city. The Indian brings Cusi to the marketplace, where Cusi trades wool for food and clothing. The Indian then takes the llamas and tells Cusi he is free to seek his heart's desire. Cusi goes to the church plaza to watch strangers pass by, hoping to find a family. He meets an Indian woman who says she is the mother of Titu, a boy Chuto had once mentored, but who had run away. Cusi then is taken in by a large family but knows he does not really belong, for he would be unwilling to share his most precious thing, the golden sandals, with them.

Cusi turns toward home and, on the way, meets an Old One, the Keeper of the Fields, one of a small group of men who are responsible for keeping Incan traditions alive. The Old One informs him that the Ayllu where the woman called him "Son" has been destroyed in a landslide. Cusi realizes that the people of the city are probably all dead. They talk and Cusi realizes that his family really is Chuto and

the llama herd, for he would willingly give anything he had to them. When Cusi arrives home, he tells Chuto that he knows he wants to stay. When Chuto is certain of Cusi's desire, he has Cusi take irrevocable vows to keep the secret of the cave, to keep the llama flock, and to train his successor. Chuto then shows him a secret cave that hides the ransom for the Incan king who was captured by the conquering Spaniards. Thought to have vanished from the land, the treasure has actually been kept in Hidden Valley and now Cusi, as well as Chuto, is a protector of it. Chuto then tells of Cusi's origin, that he was Titu's son, and that the woman who served him food was his mother. Cusi has no questions but is content with his thoughts, with staying in the valley with Chuto and the flock, and with cherishing the sandals that had belonged to his mother.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why was Cusi's discovery of the family living in the valley below the cliff important?

The discovery shows that Cusi has reached a crucial stage in his development. While he has learned to obey Chuto well, he is now beginning to wonder about the outside world. Chuto recognizes then that the time has come to introduce Cusi to the outside world and allow him the freedom to choose between the two worlds. Chuto realizes this will reduce the danger of Cusi feeling so confined that he will leave and never return, just as his father Titu had.

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Literary Analysis

Even though Titu is not physically present in the story, he is a crucial character. Why?

He is a central character because the main conflicts of the story are caused directly by his refusal to accept the responsibility of replacing Chuto as guardian of the Inca heritage. Cusi is then chosen to take Titu's place, causing Cusi's yearning for a family that is only resolved after he completes his journey.

Inferential Comprehension

What roles do the qualities of obedience and commitment play in this story?

These qualities help Cusi achieve and do things he would probably not think possible. He learns that obedience can help him avoid being captive to his emotions and feelings. Even though he is terrified when he first thinks of crossing the rope bridge, he is able to overcome it by following Chuto without question. Cusi also learns the importance of training the llamas to be obedient and to trust him. As a result, when it becomes necessary for them to follow another, such as the Indian in Cuzco, they comply. Cusi is also willing to commit to a life's vocation at a young age. In many ways, the commitment frees him from worry and restlessness and enables him to focus his energies.

Constructing Meaning

In chapter one of the story, Chuto says to the minstrel, "Curiosity can leap the highest wall; an open gate is better." What does he mean?

Chuto is referring to the upcoming journey to the outside world he is about to make with Cusi. Cusi had just that morning discovered people in the valley below them, and rather than keeping him from the outside world by forbidding him to leave, Chuto is opening the door for Cusi to learn about it. Chuto knows that even the biggest barrier can be overcome by curiosity, and he does not want Cusi's curiosity to grow to such an extent that Cusi leaves Hidden Valley permanently. This expression also hints that Chuto learned from his failure with Titu.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting People usually associate royalty with wealth and power, yet outwardly, Cusi and Chuto do not appear wealthy to the people in the cities. Assign the students to make a list of the qualities they associate with royalty and compare it to a list of the signs of royalty in Cusi and the Old Ones. This might lead to a class discussion of cultural differences and the tendency to overlook and ignore signs of dignity in other groups of people.

Recognizing Details Llamas are the heart and soul of Cusi's life, the essence of his existence, and the provider of almost all his worldly goods. Ask the students to learn a bit more about this beast of burden, both from a scientific and cultural viewpoint. Have them make a poster of the llama, labeling it with information about its size, load carrying capacity, travel stamina, etc. They can show its range and explain its diet and behaviors. Also, have them note the products obtained from llamas.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The Inca were a sophisticated Indian society with a vast empire before the Spaniards conquered them. Have the students learn about this civilization and choose some aspect of Inca life to study and present as a project. For example, students could choose one of the following topics: rulers and their reigns, the governmental system, architecture, means of communication, religious worship, transportation, or Pizarro and his conquest. Have the students display and/or report their findings to the class.

Responding to Literature Cusi makes an imaginary quipu cord for himself, in which colors and knots are used to designate certain incidents in his life. Encourage the students to create a quipu cord that will function as a memory string of their own life. Also have them make a table or key to explain the meaning of the various colors and knots they use along the string.