

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Bandit's Moon

by

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Book Information

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Twelve-year-old Annyrose relates her adventures with Joaquín Murieta and his band of outlaws in the California gold-mining region during the mid-1800s.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Booklist Editors' Choice; John & Patricia Beatty Award; State Award

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Main Characters

Annyrose Smith the eleven-year-old heroine of the story

Billy Calico the murderer of Joaquín's brother; an outlaw frequently mistaken for Joaquín himself

Joaquín Murieta a legendary Mexican outlaw who does not deserve his cruel reputation; he treats Annyrose like a daughter

Lank Smith Annyrose's seventeen-year-old brother

Mr. Yellow Bird Ridge the newspaperman in the town of Bedbug

O. O. Mary an evil, opportunistic woman who takes advantage of Annyrose after first making her believe she will help her

Pio Pio one of Joaquín's gang members who is about the same age as Annyrose

Seth and Dana Partridge two fiddle-playing professors of music from Boston who had run off to the gold rush

Sheriff Elwood Flint the sheriff of Drizzly Gulch, who holds Joaquín prisoner for a short time

Three-Fingered Jack a ruthless killer in Joaquín's gang

Vocabulary

bona fide genuine

confounded confused; intended to cause failure

impostor one who pretends to be someone else

obliged to become indebted because of having received a favor

parish the name for a county in the state of Louisiana

posse a group of men who have been given legal authority to assist a sheriff

Synopsis

The story opens in the gold rush days of California with the eleven-year-old orphan Annyrose Smith locked in O. O. Mary's barn. Annyrose and her older brother, Lank, had been walking to Mariposa, California, to search for gold when Annyrose tripped and broke her ankle. Lank had carried her to O. O. Mary's ranch for help. Believing Annyrose would be well cared for until he could send coach fare for her, he had continued with his journey. However, O. O. Mary has mistreated Annyrose, has cut her hair short and dressed her in shabby boy's clothes, and has kept her locked up for almost a week for trying to escape. One afternoon O. O. Mary hastily unlocks the door and tells Annyrose to run for her life because the notorious Mexican bandit Joaquín Murieta has been seen approaching the ranch. O. O. Mary escapes in her buggy, while Annyrose hides in a haystack.

When Joaquín arrives with his gang, the ranch is immediately searched for Billy Calico, believed to be hidden by O. O. Mary. Joaquín has long sought to kill Billy to avenge his brother's murder. Joaquín discovers tracks to the haystack and is disappointed to find what he believes to be a young boy. Because Annyrose does not trust Joaquín, she does not reveal that she is really a girl. But she does beg him to take her with him so she can be free from O. O.

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Mary. At first Joaquín refuses but then takes her because he is interested in the book she dropped as he was riding off.

Joaquín soon learns how to read his own name so he can spot the many wanted posters offering a thousand dollar reward for his head. As Annyrose rides with the gang, however, she begins to realize that Joaquín is only out for revenge against the "gringos," or white Americans who have mistreated him and his people. He is not a bloodthirsty man and does not kill indiscriminately. He treats her like a daughter and shows mercy even to those he robs.

Joaquín concocts a plan to fake his death in order to lure Billy to him. In the town of Bedbug, Annyrose helps Joaquín by describing his fate to a newspaper reporter, who writes the story and spreads it throughout the territory. But when Annyrose reads a newspaper story attributing her brother's death to Joaquín, she turns him in to the sheriff to collect the reward. Shortly thereafter, she receives a letter from her brother and realizes that the newspaper story was wrong. Her brother is still alive, and she has mistakenly betrayed Joaquín. She returns to town in time to ingeniously save him from a lynch mob, but Billy Calico arrives and shoots Joaquín in the shoulder. The sheriff shoots and kills Billy, which greatly disappoints Joaquín, as he feels he has been robbed of an opportunity to get revenge. Joaquín's gang rides into town and forces the sheriff to release Joaquín. As Joaquín rides off, he smiles at Annyrose to show that he has forgiven her betrayal.

Annyrose reunites with her brother in Bedbug and a few days later, hears a report that Joaquín and his gang have been killed by the Rangers. Several weeks later, she and her brother travel to Stockton to view Joaquín's head preserved in a bottle of alcohol. She is stunned when she sees it, though, because she recognizes it as the head of an impostor of Joaquín.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What items that Annyrose owned did O. O. Mary take from her to sell? Which loss probably angered Annyrose the most?

O. O. Mary sold Annyrose's clothing, her violin and sheet music, and her long yellow hair. The sale of her hair probably hurt the most because of how personal it was. So, to lose most of it -- and then to have it sold to persons unknown -- would have hurt Annyrose to the core.

Literary Analysis

What is the theme of *Bandit's Moon*? What events in the book illustrate the theme?

The theme is that things are not always as they appear. Lank and Annyrose are fooled by O. O. Mary's pretended kindness. Her true nature, however, is revealed after Lank leaves Annyrose behind in her care. Also, Joaquín and his gang are believed to be evil cutthroats, but as the story develops, the reader discovers that Joaquín has a kind and thoughtful side to him. Appearances are also misinterpreted when Annyrose reads the report of her brother's death. She later realizes that her brother is still alive and that she has wrongly accused Joaquín of murdering him. The story closes with the revelation that the head displayed in a jar turns out to belong to an impostor rather than Joaquín.

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Inferential Comprehension

Joaquín was compared to Robin Hood, who robbed from the rich to give to the poor. Is this an accurate comparison? Why or why not?

Some students might claim that he is like Robin Hood and refer to Joaquín's self-proclaimed justification in chapter twelve, in which he speaks of his lands and possessions before the gold rush. These students may add that if Joaquín stole gold from Yankee miners, it was his gold anyway. So, it could be argued that he was not guilty of theft at all. On the other hand, other students could point out that there is no direct evidence in the story that he gave to the poor. He seems to have distributed the gold only to those belonging to his gang. Therefore, in this respect, he would not be like Robin Hood.

Constructing Meaning

Euphemisms are pleasant words or phrases that replace unpleasant words or phrases. For example, the author used expressions like "has been put to bed with a shovel" and "wearing a wooden overcoat" to describe death and burial. What are some other euphemisms commonly used today? What do they mean?

Students may offer examples such as pre-owned (used), powdering one's nose (using the restroom), sanitation worker (garbage collector), conflict (war), distorting the facts (lying), strategic withdrawal (retreat), or inebriated (drunk).

Teachable Skills

Identifying Persuasive Language Joaquín continually travels knowing that wanted posters of him hang everywhere. Identify together the criteria for an effective wanted poster such as the reward amount, aliases, crimes for which the fugitive is wanted, distinguishing marks like freckles, scars, or tattoos, what to do if seen, etc. Assign students to "invent" an outlaw and create a wanted poster for him or her. Posters should be displayed around the classroom.

Extending Meaning Annyrose says that when Joaquín rode off with his men after his men freed

him from the sheriff of Drizzly Gulch, she never saw him alive again. Get students into groups of three or four. Ask them to make a story-idea web to serve as an outline for an extra chapter for *Bandit's Moon*. This is to be a chapter in which Annyrose and Joaquín are reunited. Students do not actually have to write the chapter, but only tell what they would include in the narrative if they were to write it. Each group should have a spokesperson to share the outline orally when the class is back in a large group.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Many small mining towns are mentioned in this story (Examples: Drizzly Gulch, Bedbug, and Poverty Creek). Direct students to pick one name and, in their own words, write how they think the town got its name. They may also find information on the origin of a real town, which could lead to making a chart with two columns: one for "Student's Imagination" and the other for "Actual."

Responding to Literature In the "Author's Note," which follows the story, there is a reference to fact being turned into legend. Discuss legends and why very often the legend of a character outgrows the reality of the character and his deeds. Ask students to pick a real living person, such as an actor, athlete, or political figure, and write an imaginative legend about that person that involves "tall tale" elements.