

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Brighty of the Grand Canyon

by
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Book Information

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In this story, a lone burro creates friendships with a number of men in the Grand Canyon and helps to capture a murderer.

Topics: Animals, Misc./Other; Natural Environments, Canyons

Main Characters

Bright Angel (Brighty) a wild burro who lives in the Grand Canyon; he has a free and independent spirit

Hezekiah Appleyard (Old Timer) an old prospector who knows the territory of the Grand Canyon well; he is murdered by a thief who wants his copper mine

Homer Hobbs Uncle Jim's nephew; he works in the canyon during the summers

Jake Irons a beaver trapper and scoundrel; he murders Old Timer for the copper

Jimmy Owen (Uncle Jim) a friend of Old Timer; he befriends Brighty as he lives and works in the canyon

Mimi Old Timer's crippled niece; she needs a wheelchair to get around better

Sheriff the lawman of the area; he is a longtime friend of Uncle Jim's and vows to find Old Timer's murderer

the artist a man who comes to the canyon to paint; Brighty spends several weeks with him

Theodore Roosevelt the President of the United States; he makes the Grand Canyon a national park

Vocabulary

abyss a bottomless pit

atone to pay for the loss or injury inflicted on another

contempt scorn and loathing

hobbled tied in a way that prevents straying

wiles tricks and deceptions

Synopsis

Brighty is a young wild burro who lives in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. He is befriended by an old prospector everyone calls "Old Timer." Brighty visits Old Timer's copper claim in the warm canyon during the winter but does not allow himself to be completely tamed. He wanders off to the cool pastures on the rim of the canyon in summer.

One evening, a stranger, Jake Irons, shows up at Old Timer's camp. The stranger murders Old Timer to get the copper for himself. Shortly thereafter, the sheriff and a friend of Old Timer whom everyone knows as "Uncle" Jimmy Owens discover that Old Timer is missing; they suspect he has been murdered and begin a long and determined search for the murderer.

Meanwhile, Brighty follows the seasons and migrates from valley bottom to high pastures visiting all his human and animal contacts up and down the canyon. He becomes friends with Homer Hobbs, who is Uncle Jim's nephew, and often carries water loads for the boy.

One year, government people come to build a bridge over the river in the canyon. Brighty and Uncle Jim are given the honor of being the first to cross the new bridge. Once on the other side of the canyon, Brighty finds a herd of wild burros like himself. He fights the dominant burro and wins the position of head of the herd. For three years he leads the burro herd. When a new, younger burro arrives to challenge Brighty for the dominant role, Brighty is defeated. He runs into Jake Irons, who captures him, prods him across the bridge to his old surroundings, and forces him into service. Jake, suspecting that the sheriff is looking for him, is trying to escape to Utah. The pair travel through a blizzard, and Brighty leads them to Uncle Jim's cabin, which

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Jim has left for the winter. They stay there overnight and set out again the next morning and stop at a deserted ranch house. They stay there overnight, and Jake plans to leave and cross into Utah the next morning, but a blizzard keeps them trapped in the house for days. One day, Homer stumbles into the house, nearly frozen. He, too, is taking shelter from the storm on his way to a new job.

As the days go by, the three exhaust the supply of food. Just as Jake is ready to shoot Brighty for meat, Uncle Jim bursts in looking for Homer. That night, Uncle Jim suddenly realizes that Jake is the murderer of Old Timer, and he takes him prisoner. In an attempt to escape several days later, Jake shoots Brighty and severely wounds him. As Uncle Jim works to keep Brighty alive, the sheriff arrives with a search party. The group loads Brighty onto a toboggan and takes Homer, Jim, and Brighty to town with Jake in custody. The story ends with Brighty recovering his strong spirit.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When Brighty meets the herd of wild burros, he wins the position of leadership and exiles the loser. Three years later, Brighty is exiled when a younger and stronger burro takes over the herd. Why is this an important aspect of nature?

Nature instills competitiveness to enable the survival of the fittest. In having the strongest burro be the leader of the herd, nature is ensuring the herd's survival and the endurance of the species.

Literary Analysis

Brighty was born free. His freedom and independent spirit are essential components of his character. What are some things that his freedom symbolizes in the story?

Although Brighty enjoys and sometimes yearns for the company of humans, his freedom is more important to him than his friendships. His freedom is a symbol of the spirit of the Grand Canyon and the people who have chosen the hard life in the canyon over the comforts of civilization. Brighty's freedom is also a symbol of our country's frontiersmen who risked their lives seeking their freedom and independence.

Inferential Comprehension

The story ends with Uncle Jim and the rescue team pulling Brighty out of the canyon and taking Brighty, Homer, Jim, and Jake to town. What most likely will happen after the group arrives in the town?

It is likely that Jake will be put in jail and will be convicted of the murder of Old Timer. He will probably spend the rest of his life in prison. Brighty will likely heal and regain his strength with the help of Uncle Jim during the remainder of the winter. When spring comes and Brighty once again feels strong, he will most likely return to the canyon, where he will spend his last days enjoying his freedom and independence. His friendship with Uncle Jim will continue as long as they both remain alive.

Constructing Meaning

If you had the same choice Brighty had, of being comfortable but tamed, or independent but insecure, which would you choose? Why?

The price for independence is giving up a sense of security. In attaining independence, one likely has to take some personal risks and sacrifice some of the things that offer security. This is a decision that many face as adulthood approaches. Some students will eagerly seek risk and adventure, while others may pursue a more settled, predictable path in life.

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Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors One of the minor characters of the story is President Theodore Roosevelt, who initiated a system of national parks in the United States. Have each student do research and write a short report on Theodore Roosevelt or the national park system.

Recognizing Setting The story takes place in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Have the students work in groups to develop a written or oral travelogue that would help a person learn more about the Grand Canyon to decide whether or not to take a tour of the area. The students can use pictures from the Internet or travel magazines, or they can create a video promoting the Grand Canyon as a tourist attraction. The travelogue should include the essential elements of location, weather conditions, attractions, activities, wildlife, and precautions.

Understanding Characterization Brighty experiences many events in the story. The reader gets a sense of what Brighty is thinking and doing by his actions in each situation. Have the students work in small groups to plan an interview of Brighty. Ask one student in each group to volunteer to take the role of Brighty and assign the other students to act as reporters or interviewers. The interviewers should ask "Brighty" specific questions about a situation, and "Brighty" should respond by giving reasons or background information or by describing his feelings. Each interview session should then be conducted with the rest of the class listening.

Extending Meaning Brighty spends his entire life in the Grand Canyon area. He is a familiar part of the landscape as men travel within the area. Have the students do research on the origin and characteristics of burros and write a report on their findings. The report should include information such as range, habitat, food, and life span. They can also include burros' past and current relationship with man.