

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Call Me Francis Tucket by Gary Paulsen

## Book Information

Gary Paulsen, Call Me Francis Tucket  
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Book Level: 5.5  
Interest Level: MG

Tucket now feels more confident that he can handle anything. A year ago on a wagon train, he was kidnapped by a Pawnee hunting party. He escaped with the help of a mountain man. Now he is alone.

**Topics:** Adventure, Rescue/Save; Adventure, Survival; History, Frontier/Pioneer Life; Series, Tucket Adventures

## Main Characters

Billy Lottie's six-year-old brother

Courtweiler a traveler who robs Francis of his horse and supplies

Dubs a gigantic man who accompanies Courtweiler

Francis Tucket a fourteen-year-old boy searching for his family members, who have gone west by wagon train

Lottie a talkative eight-year-old girl, whose father has died of cholera

## Vocabulary

**canter** a smooth gait, slower than a gallop

**dissembling** putting on a false appearance of something; pretending

**fractious** unruly; irritable; troublesome

**hobble** to fasten together the legs of a horse to prevent it from straying

## Synopsis

As Francis Tucket, a fourteen-year-old pioneer boy, waits for the wagon train to begin moving, he remembers the events which brought him here. He thinks about traveling west with his family in the other wagon train, his capture by Pawnee Indians,

and his rescue by the mountain man Jason Grimes, who taught him survival skills over the course of the previous year. It was only yesterday that he had left Grimes and met this wagon train, whose wagon master had Francis search for food. As Francis rides over the top of a ridge, he sees a large dust cloud, which means buffalo are traveling through the area. He decides to hunt alone rather than go back for the older men, but this turns out to be a serious mistake.

Francis rides directly into the herd and shoots a young buffalo. The noise from his gun sends the entire herd stampeding, with Francis and his horse caught in the middle, forcing them to run along. When they finally stop, Francis is unsure how long and in what direction they have been running. He realizes his horse needs rest and he needs food. Easing his horse to the edge of the herd, he shoots a small buffalo, causing the herd to run in the opposite direction this time. He uses his survival skills to prepare some meat, but exhaustion takes over and Francis goes to sleep. Francis awakes to find two men, Courtweiler and Dubs, standing over him holding his rifle. Courtweiler and Dubs steal everything Francis has and abandon him on the prairie with their half-dead mule. Deciding he will follow them and retrieve his belongings when they stop for the night, Francis runs for most of that day. He notices that the old mule is keeping up with him.

Late that night, Francis sneaks into the campsite to steal back his horse and supplies. The men awaken and are kicked by the mule, giving Francis time to escape. He leaves the two alone and rides off, with the mule following close behind. Half a day later a sudden rain shower washes away any trace of the wagon train he is trying to follow.

Francis, unable to measure time, travels through the tall grass of the prairie. He investigates an abandoned wagon and finds two small children, Lottie and Billy. They tell Francis that they have been thrown out of a wagon train because their father had contracted cholera. They also tell him that their father recently abandoned them and walked off on his own. Finding the dead father a short way from the wagon, Francis packs up what

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supplies the mule can carry and takes the children with him. Later that day they meet two Indians hunting for food who allow Francis and the children to proceed. The next day Francis and the children overtake the wagon train but the men refuse to take the children, fearing they are contagious. They tell Francis to take the children to a nearby trading post.

Two days later he finds the post, and the owner and his wife agree to take the children. Francis leaves them, but something bothers him about the man. That night, Francis realizes the man intends to work the children as if they were livestock. The next day he rides back to the post and finds Lottie and Billy crying because the man has beaten them for working slowly. Francis takes them back, warning the man that he will shoot him if he tries to stop them. Together, Francis and the children ride off as a family heading west.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

Why are the people on the wagon train so afraid of Lottie and Billy, who are just little children?

*Diseases spread very rapidly among the wagon trains due to close quarters, shared food and water, and poor medical treatment. When the children's father contracted cholera, one of the deadliest diseases the pioneers confronted, the people in the train were so afraid of it spreading that they sent both the father and his children away. They know little about the disease, which contributes to their fear of contracting it. When the children are brought back, the men do not even want to have the children breathe on them for fear of contracting cholera. They are so afraid, they even threaten to kill the children to prevent the spread of the disease.*

### Literary Analysis

Why might Francis feel responsible for the children's safety?

*Francis knows that the children will die if he does not take care of them, and he disagrees with the wagon train's decision to abandon the children because of their father's disease. Francis knows what it is like to lose one's parents, since he is also looking for his family. He identifies with the fears of the children and remembers his hard life among the Pawnee Indians and with Jason Grimes. He does not want Lottie and Billy to have to suffer what he did the past two years.*

### Inferential Comprehension

What type of men are Courtweiler and Dubs? What might have happened to them to bring them to the same spot at Francis?

*Courtweiler appears to be the leader of this team and Dubs the enforcer of whatever Courtweiler wants. Judging by Courtweiler's clothing and language, one could infer that he might be some type of traveling con artist. The Old West had many types of con artists who preyed on the vulnerability of the pioneers. Courtweiler seems to be this type of person, and somewhere attained Dubs as his faithful companion.*

### Constructing Meaning

The author writes that Francis sees "the edge of the world" when he rides to the top of the bluff. What does he mean by this?

*The plains are so vast that Francis can see many miles without disruption of the view. It seems to go on forever and will take forever to cross. He also feels that it would be impossible for anyone to find another person in this huge place called the West.*

## Teachable Skills

### Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Preventing and treating diseases was paramount to the survival of the pioneers. Cholera was one of the deadly diseases that took the lives of many

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pioneers. Have students research this disease to find out how doctors treat it today. Also have them locate areas of the world in which cholera is still a serious threat.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Locate books about the Old West containing information on the plains. Have students find information identifying the length of time it took wagon trains to travel across the plains. How is our concept of the West different today than it was for Francis? How is it similar?

**Describing Actions or Events** Divide the students into groups. Have them decide what they would take if they were a family going west in a wagon train. What would they need? How much of each item would they have to take along? Which things would be most important? Think about what things Francis thought were important when his belongings were taken.

**Responding to Literature** *The Oregon Trail* simulation game is available for computers or as a board game. Check to see if your school or local library has the game. This game challenges students to make choices on the amount of supplies to put in their wagons, financial decisions, hunting, as well as having to deal with problems that arise such as sickness, snake bites, and losing items from their wagons. It provides a fun way for students to experience the difficulties of traveling across the country by wagon.