

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Children of Green Knowe by L.M. Boston

Book Information

L.M. Boston, The Children of Green Knowe

Quiz Number: 5064

Harcourt, Inc., 2002

ISBN 0-15-202462-X; LCCN

183 Pages

Book Level: 5.3

Interest Level: MG

Tolly comes to live with his great-grandmother at the ancient house of Green Knowe and becomes friends with three children who lived there in the seventeenth century.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Book Sense Book of the Year Award/Honorees; Carnegie Medal/Honors

Topics: Community Life, School; Science Fiction, Time Travel; Series, Green Knowe Chronicles

Main Characters

Alexander one of the three ghost children; he is known for his musical talents

Feste Toby's ghost horse

Granny/ Mrs. Oldknow Tolly's great-grandmother who lives at Green Knowe

Linnet one of the ghost children; she has a great love for animals

Mr. Boggis Mrs. Oldknow's helper

Toby one of the ghost children; he is known for his horse, Feste

Toseland Gunning/Tolly a young boy who visits his great-grandmother

Vocabulary

canter a gait slower than a gallop but faster than a trot

encumber to weigh down or hinder

malefactor a criminal

philter a magic potion or charm

vermilion a bright red or yellowish red color

yew evergreen tree or shrub

Synopsis

Toseland Gunning, who usually spends his holidays with the head mistress of his boarding school, has been invited to stay with his great-grandmother Oldknow. He arrives during the flood season, and he must be brought by rowboat to the house. Toseland is amazed by his great-grandmother's home. It is like a castle and is filled with flowers, mirrors, china, and woodcarvings of children. Toseland meets his great-grandmother, and she gives him the nickname Tolly. She helps him feel at home and allows him to take to bed an ebony mouse carving.

The next morning, Tolly feeds the birds the margarine that Granny spreads on his hands. After breakfast, Tolly discovers a family portrait from long ago. He learns that the children in the picture, Linnet, Toby, and Alexander, are his ancestors.

While exploring the grounds of Green Knowe, Tolly discovers an old horse stall. Mr. Boggis, Granny's helper, informs Tolly that the stall belongs to Feste, Toby's horse. Fascinated, Tolly begins the routine of leaving sugar for Feste's ghost. That night, Tolly thinks he hears the sounds of whispering and little feet running across the floor of his room. He calls out to the culprits, but they only respond with teasing giggles.

Early the next morning, Tolly wakes to find the floods have cleared. After breakfast, Tolly sets out to explore the garden. He finds the statue of St. Christopher and all the yew animals. Again, Tolly hears the children's laughter and tries to draw them out. He plays hide and seek with the phantoms in the garden. Later that evening, Granny tells Tolly the story of Toby and his horse, Feste.

Tolly wakes the next morning to find a chaffinch on his chest. When he goes to tell Granny, he hears children's voices in her room. The children tease Tolly the entire day without showing themselves to him, until he goes back to the house discouraged. Finally, Linnet and Alexander show themselves to Tolly in the entryway mirror. Later that night, Tolly learns that Granny found out about the children from

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her grandfather. At first, she only saw them in mirrors, then they actually appeared in the room.

The next morning Tolly finds the key to the toy box. He and Granny open it and find Alexander's flute, children's books, the deer's collar, Russian dolls, dominoes, and Toby's sword. Tolly asks Granny why Toby no longer wants his sword, and Granny explains that the children are dead. She tells Tolly that the children died in the Great Plague. Tolly is saddened by this news, although he knows the children are ghosts.

After spending the afternoon playing with the objects from the toy box, Granny tells Tolly the story of Black Ferdie. She explains that Black Ferdie was a horse thief who had seen Feste's ghost. Tolly later learns that Black Ferdie's gypsy mother put a curse on Green Noah, which had caused it to become an overgrown tree with a demonic shape.

Tolly wakes to a snow-covered wonderland the next morning. He goes out in the snow and discovers a tree where the children play. All three children are present and Alexander asks Tolly to keep an eye on the fox, as there are many animals present.

Soon after, Granny tells Tolly the story of Alexander and his flute. After learning the story of Alexander and his flute, Tolly decides he would like a flute also. He and Granny prepare for Christmas by arranging to get partridges for the children. While Granny goes shopping with a friend, Tolly reads an article that describes the curse of the Green Noah. He is frightened after reading the article and very glad when Granny comes home. Tolly confronts Granny with his knowledge, but she tells him not to think about the Green Noah.

Before Christmas, Tolly has a frightening encounter with the Green Noah, and he calls to the children for help. Green Noah is then struck by lightning during a sudden storm. The next morning Granny assures Tolly they will burn the rest of Green Noah on Christmas Day.

Tolly and Granny attend midnight mass, and Tolly

falls asleep and dreams of St. Christopher. On Christmas morning, Tolly opens his gifts and goes out to Feste's stall. There he meets Feste, Toby's phantom horse. Tolly is overcome with excitement. When Feste disappears, Tolly goes to the tree he and Granny decorated for the children. He visits with the children and receives a field mouse from Linnet. Tolly returns to the house to find that Percy, Mr. Boggis's grandson, will be spending Christmas Day with them. Excited to have a real friend, Tolly pulls out his mouse, only to discover it is his own ebony mouse carving. Later, Granny gives Tolly his Christmas present, a puppy he names Orlando. Happily tucked into bed that evening, Tolly is informed that he will be spending all of his holidays at Green Knowe.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

After Tolly tells Granny about his first encounter with the yew animals in the forest, Granny asks if Tolly has seen all the other green things. Then she asks him to describe each thing he saw. Tolly lists the deer, squirrel, peacock, hare, cock, and hen. After this, Granny seems relieved. Why do you think she may have been relieved?

Granny is probably relieved that Tolly did not encounter Green Noah. She is likely to be concerned that the curse of Green Noah might somehow affect Tolly. When Tolly encounters Green Noah later in the story, the reader can see why Granny was concerned.

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Literary Analysis

Tolly and Granny have many adventures with Toby, Linnet, and Alexander. Tolly spends time playing with these "children on the grounds." In your opinion, do these ghosts truly exist, or are they figments of Granny's and Tolly's imaginations?

It is easy to assume that the ghosts do exist, based on the narration of the story. The children speak to and touch Tolly and Granny. The children also seem to help Tolly when Green Noah frightens him. Even Mr. Boggis talks of Feste's ghost as if he believes in it.

Inferential Comprehension

In the beginning of the story, Tolly often hears the laughter of a young boy in Granny's presence. When he turns, he does not see a boy; he sees Granny. What do you think Tolly really hears, if anything at all?

It is possible that Tolly hears the laughter of Alexander or Toby, the ghosts that inhabit Green Knowe. These ghosts often tease Tolly and laugh when they know he cannot see them. It is also possible that Granny, being a little mischievous, is a party to their tricks.

Constructing Meaning

By the end of the story, it seems as if Tolly is very comfortable staying at Green Knowe. He has learned about his ancestry and has become interested in his family. Based on his experiences and personality, do you think Tolly will share his adventures at Green Knowe with his father? Why or why not?

Throughout the story, Tolly does not seem to be very close to his father. He rarely spends holidays with his father, and he seems to resent his father's absence. In addition, Tolly finds a confidante in Granny. Granny seems to help fill the void left by his mother's death. Therefore, it is doubtful that Tolly would share his experiences with his father.

Recognizing Setting Ask your students to create their own detailed drawing of Green Knowe. They should include the grounds, Feste's stall, the house, the St. Christopher statue, the moat, Green Noah, and all the yew animals. Students can choose any season for their drawing. For instance, they could create the winter or flood scenes described in the book, or they can predict how Green Knowe will look in the summer or spring.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Tolly has many ancestors that he learns about from Granny. Ask your students to research their own ancestors. Then have them create their own family tree.

Recognizing Details Cut sheets of construction paper into large rectangles. Ask your students to create their own sign for Feste's stall. Then display their signs throughout the classroom.

Responding to Literature According to Granny, Alexander used to play "Greensleeves" on the flute and the thrushes would sing the tune. Play a recording of "Greensleeves" to your students. Then ask them to write a short response to the music.

Teachable Skills