

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Courage of Sarah Noble

by
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Book Information

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A charming and brave eight-year-old girl accompanies her father into the wilderness of Connecticut in 1707 to cook for him while he builds a new home for his family.

Award: Newbery Honor

Topics: English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 2, 90%; Family Life, Daughters; People, Native American; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Series, Ready-for-Chapters

Main Characters

Abigail Mistress Robinson's daughter who is kind to Sarah

John Noble Sarah's father, who purchases land in Connecticut for his family to settle

John, David, Stephen Sarah's brothers

Lemuel, Robert Mistress Robinson's sons, who tease Sarah

Mary, Hannah, Margaret, Mabel Sarah's sisters

Mistress Robinson a woman who allows Sarah and her father to stay in her home one night during their journey

Sarah Noble a young girl who finds her courage while traveling with her father in the wilderness of Connecticut

Sarah's mother a conscientious woman who journeys to the new family home after the house has been built

Tall John a friendly, helpful Native American who helps John Noble build his home; he watches over Sarah when John must leave

Vocabulary

cloak a long, loose outer garment similar to a coat

courage an inner strength that helps someone feel brave

petticoats underskirts worn by girls and women

settlement the homes and people in a new community

Synopsis

In 1707, Sarah Noble and her father, John Noble, set out from their home in Westfield, Massachusetts, in order to build a house on the land he had purchased in the wilderness of Connecticut. They are traveling to the yet unsettled area that will eventually be known as New Milford, Connecticut. Sarah's father has five children older than Sarah, but they do not want to come, so Sarah and her father travel alone.

During the long trek through the great forests, Sarah is at first frightened by the ever-present animal sounds. She trusts in her father and, remembering her mother's words "Keep up your courage, Sarah Noble," bravely sets herself to face all of the challenges. When they come to a settler's cabin, a woman and her children are skeptical of their efforts, and the children tell Sarah she will be killed by the cruel and hostile Indians.

When Sarah and her father finally reach the place that will be their home, they take refuge in a cave while Mr. Noble builds the house for the family. With the help of his horse, Mr. Noble constructs a sturdy home for the family. From the homesite Sarah can see the Indian village on the shores of the river downstream, and initially she fears the Indians. She remembers, however, what her father said about treating Indians as welcome guests. When the Indian children arrive Sarah is a bit frightened, but she begins to read from the Bible to the children and eventually becomes friends with them.

Finally the house is ready, and Mr. Noble has to return to Westfield to bring back the rest of the family. Because he has to travel swiftly and there will be no room coming back, Sarah is left in the care of an Indian family. The father of that Indian

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family is Tall John, who had helped them get settled. For several months Sarah lives with Tall John's family. She lives exactly as the Indians live. She wears their clothing, eats their food, and although she cannot speak their language, she gets along well with them.

There are frightening times, such as the night the tribe expects to be attacked by a hostile neighboring tribe. Sarah again summons up all of her courage and places her faith in the hands of Tall John and the other Indians of his tribe. But the night passes, and the hostile tribe does not attack.

At last, her father returns with the rest of the family, and Sarah is very happy to see her mother and father and brothers and sisters and to finally move into their new home. Sarah's dream is to grow up and marry, have a family, and become a teacher. In the meantime, though, she is content to be in her new home with her beloved family.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does the family Sarah stays with along the journey have the attitude they do toward Indians?

This family probably has had little direct contact with Indians. Because they are different, they assume the Indians' way of life is bad and that they are "savages." When Sarah lives with Tall John and his family, however, she discovers that this is not true.

Literary Analysis

Courage is often thought of as an individual trait that is unrelated to other people. Yet, Sarah's courage does not exist by itself. How is courage often the result of relationships with other people?

Courage is an effort of the will, but it is also built upon the trust and hope placed in ourselves and others. Sarah's story illustrates this point exactly; she is courageous because she trusts the judgment and ability of her father and mother and Tall John and his family.

Inferential Comprehension

In reading stories of life on the frontier, it often appears that people of prior generations were able to stand the hardships of life better than people today? Is this assumption correct? If so, why?

Most students will probably agree that today we are less able to tolerate hardship than our ancestors. We are no longer accustomed to the difficulties of the pioneer life. We have also lost some of the skills necessary for survival at that time. It might be fun to discuss some of these things and contrast them with the luxuries we enjoy today. Perhaps the children would like to experience a little of the pioneer life. For example, you might have them use no electricity or paper for a while or endure something else to give them a taste of hardship and a respect for luxury.

Constructing Meaning

When Sarah leaves her New England village to go into the wilderness, the great forests are the boundaries that mark the end of the civilized world. If you were to make such a trip, what aspects of the trip might frighten you the most?

Allow children to use their imagination. They might suggest being afraid of such things as wild animals, hostile peoples, hunger, thirst, bad weather, getting lost, being injured, dark moonless nights, and frightening noises. Help them understand through discussion that most of us are afraid of something. You could also discuss how to deal with fear.

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Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Sarah's last name is Noble. Have students look up the word "noble" in the dictionary and write down its definition. Next have the students look for examples in the story that show how Sarah's name fits her personality.

Extending Meaning Sarah has to gain courage while traveling through the wilderness and moving to a strange place. Our modern environment requires its own kind of courage. Have students list examples of issues today that challenge children and require courage as well. Next, have the students write a paragraph about a time they needed courage.

Recognizing Setting Today Connecticut does not seem like a wilderness or appear to be very far from Massachusetts. Find a map of these states and have the students locate Westfield and New Milford. Have the students calculate the distance of the journey and determine how far they might be able to walk each day. Also have students list the various types of transportation that could be used to make this trip much easier today.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Sarah learns the moccasin game from her new friends. This game is easy and fun to play. Each group needs a pebble (or some other small object) and four or five shoes. One player must turn away while the others hide the pebble in one shoe. Then the player can begin guessing which shoe the pebble is hidden in. Rotate until all children have had turns to hide the pebble and guess its location.