

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Ghost of Fossil Glen

by
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Book Information

Cynthia DeFelice, The Ghost of Fossil Glen
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Book Level: 4.9
Interest Level: MG

Allie knows it's not her imagination when she hears a voice and sees in her mind's eye the face of a girl who seems to be seeking Allie's help.

Award: SLJ Best Book; Spur Award/Finalist; State Award

Topics: Community Life, Helping Others;
Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other;
Mysteries, Hauntings/Ghosts

Main Characters

Allie Nichols an imaginative sixth-grader who discovers a mystery after she hears the voice of a ghost

Dub Allie's best friend

Hoover Mr. Henry's dog

Karen and Pam Allie's classmates who value popularity above real friendship

Lucy Stiles the eleven-year-old girl Raymond Gagney murdered

Michael Allie's four-year-old brother

Mr. and Mrs. Nichols Allie's parents

Mr. Curtis Raymond Gagney's employee who sells the furniture in the Stiles home to the antique shop owned by Allie's mother

Mr. Henry Allie's sixth-grade teacher

Raymond Gagney Rebecca Stiles's boyfriend, who murdered Lucy in an attempt to cover up his plot to marry Rebecca for her money

Rebecca Stiles Lucy's mother

Vocabulary

fossils the remains of plants and animals preserved in rocks

glen a valley

obliterate to eliminate or erase

shale a brittle clay-like rock

trilobite an extinct marine animal

Synopsis

As the story opens, Allie Nichols, a sixth grader who has been hunting fossils in Fossil Glen, finds herself dangerously close to falling off a cliff. A strange, unseen voice, however, guides her to safety. At home, she feels a chilling sensation and hears the same voice when she finds a package with no name on it in the mailbox. It is an empty, red leather-bound book, perfect to use for a journal writing assignment given by her teacher, Mr. Henry. Then, in her mind's eye, she sees a girl with curly black hair, and with arms reaching toward Allie, crying, "Help me!" Upstairs in her room, Allie finds "I am L" written on the first page of the journal.

The next day, in celebration of Earth Day, Allie's class cleans up Fossil Glen Cemetery, located behind the school. While there, she discovers the grave of Lucy Stiles, an eleven-year-old girl who died in 1994. After school, Allie visits her mother's antique shop, where she chooses a desk for her room. Allie's mother had bought the desk and other furniture from a man who had been assigned to empty the abandoned Stiles house. That night Allie has a nightmare in which she feels hands around her neck and has a sense of falling.

The following day, while researching in the library, Allie reads the account of Lucy Stiles's death in the newspaper and learns that the body was never found. On the way home from school, Allie learns that Fossil Glen will soon become a real estate development. When Mrs. Nichols tells her family that the developer of the property is desperately looking for a red leather-bound diary, Allie wonders if there is a connection between her journal and the diary. Later, she finds Lucy Stiles's diary in a secret drawer of the antique desk.

Reading the diary, Allie discovers that Lucy knew Raymond Gagney planned to marry Lucy's mother only to acquire money for developing Fossil Glen.

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When Lucy discovered Raymond had read her diary and knew his secret had been uncovered, she made her last entry, indicating she was scared of him. Allie realizes that the developer is Raymond and that he killed Lucy, so she anonymously calls him and tells him she has the book.

Now Allie realizes that Lucy has chosen her to expose the murder. Allie rises to the challenge and determines to bring Raymond to justice and stop the development of the glen. The next day, drawn to the scene of Lucy's death in Fossil Glen, Allie sees a vision of a man dragging a girl upstream, with something in his hand. Hearing footsteps on the path, she is very afraid that Raymond has figured out who she is and is trailing her.

On a field trip with her class to Fossil Glen the next day, she is led upstream by Mr. Henry's dog, Hoover. As Hoover brings her the cuff of a shirt and a long, white bone, Raymond appears on the path and chases Allie with a shovel to the base of a cliff. Allie climbs the cliff with Raymond in pursuit. Raymond apparently sees Lucy's ghost, however, loses his grip, and plunges to his death. After being rescued, Allie tells the police about the diary, informs them that Raymond murdered Lucy, and identifies the location of Lucy's body. However, she chooses not to tell them about the ghost. In the end Allie knows Lucy will not be back because Lucy's spirit can now rest in peace.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why do you think Lucy chooses Allie to expose her murder?

There may be a number of reasons why Lucy chooses Allie. Lucy was eleven years old and in the sixth grade when she died, which is the same as Allie's present age and grade level. Also, Lucy had Mr. Henry for a teacher, enjoyed collecting fossils, was intelligent, and had an active imagination. These are all things she has in common with Allie. As a result, Lucy probably believes that Allie is the person most likely to believe in ghosts and to take up her cause.

Literary Analysis

What qualities do you think Mr. Henry has that make him the kind of teacher to whom Allie might tell her whole story, including her contact with a ghost?

Some attributes that students might mention are his understanding nature, patience, genuine interest in his students, sense of humor, and respect for the students' privacy.

Inferential Comprehension

If Hoover had not found Lucy's body, how else might it have been found?

The students can explore numerous possibilities. Perhaps Allie would have discovered Raymond digging up the body, or another student might have noticed red and black fabric protruding from the ground and investigated further. Or the heavy spring run-off of water may have eroded the bank and uncovered the body.

Constructing Meaning

After Allie saw the shovel in her last vision of the man dragging a body, she "stood quietly, considering the significance of the vision." What was the significance of the shovel?

The inclusion of a shovel meant that the man had buried the body to prevent its discovery. His plan worked initially, as searchers were led to look for the body in the wrong places.

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Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Ask the students to research ghosts. Have them identify any common findings about ghosts. Then have them compare and contrast their findings with those of Dub and Allie in a brief report.

Recognizing Cause and Effect Plan a field trip similar to the one Mr. Henry's class took. Choose a site such as a cemetery or park that the students can clean. Ask the students to write a reflection on the effect their activity has on the environment.

Responding to Literature In this book, Mr. Henry, Mr. Henry's students, and Lucy Stiles all write journals. Ask the class to begin writing a journal to be regularly checked by the teacher. Journals may be used to exercise creative writing and various other writing skills taught throughout the year.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Fossil collecting, which was of great interest to both Allie and Lucy, may also be of interest to the students. If any students already have a fossil collection, ask them to give a presentation showing and identifying the fossils to the class. Or, have the students do research on fossils and their identification. Ask the students to determine whether the area in which they live contains fossils. If so, perhaps a field trip could be arranged to go fossil hunting. Set up a display in the classroom or school library of fossils that are discovered.