

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Homer Price

by

Robert McCloskey

Book Information

Robert McCloskey, Homer Price
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Ingenious young Homer Price captures thieves, solves mysteries, and helps people in trouble.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Adventure, Misc./Other; Humor/Funny, Funny; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Series, Homer Price

Main Characters

Aroma Homer's pet skunk that helps him capture a group of robbers

Aunt Agnes Homer's conservative aunt who objects to her husband's buying labor saving devices because it only gives Uncle Ulysses more time to waste

Dulcey Dooner the union man who insists on high wages to put up signs; confusion reigns when Dulcey gets drunk and does not do the job

Freddy Homer's friend who worships a comic-book hero named Super-Duper until he finds out Super-Duper's powers are only imaginary

Homer Price an intelligent and creative boy who lives near the town of Centerburg

Louis Freddy's impressionable younger brother

Michael Murphy an eccentric inventor who comes to Centerburg after living for thirty years in isolation; he has invented a musical mouse trap

Miss Naomi Enders the wealthy descendent of the founder of Centerburg; she helps Homer make doughnut batter and builds new housing in Centerburg

Miss Terwilliger the clever and talented woman who is being courted by both the sheriff and Homer's Uncle Telly; she outwits both men when they enter into a contest to decide who will get to marry her

Mr. Gabby an advertising man who stops for a doughnut in Uncle Ulysses' lunch room; he tries to help Homer get rid of the doughnuts when the machine overproduces

Rupert Black the boy who finds the diamond bracelet and wins the prize offered by Miss Enders

Super-Duper an actor who plays the part of a super hero in a series of movies

the sheriff the sheriff of Centerburg, who often jumbles his words; he competes with Uncle Telly for Miss Terwilliger's hand

Uncle Telemachus (Uncle Telly) Homer's uncle who marries Miss Terwilliger after she wins the title of String Saving Champion of the World

Uncle Ulysses Homer's progressive uncle who loves new inventions and persuades Miss Enders to build a modern neighborhood in Centerburg

Vocabulary

homestead family home

modest humble

pinochle a card game

quavery shaky

speculate to guess

spurn to turn down

Synopsis

Homer Price is a collection of six short stories about the events in Homer's hometown, Centerburg.

The first story, "The Case of the Sensational Scent," tells about Homer witnessing a band of robbers stealing the prize money that had been awarded to the winner of an after shave slogan contest. Later, Homer finds the robbers when he and his pet skunk, Aroma, are taking a shortcut through the woods. When Aroma sprays the prize money and narrowly escapes being injured by the robbers, Homer and Aroma run home.

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Shortly afterward, the robbers rent a room at the tourist camp that Homer's family owns. Homer recognizes them and calls the sheriff, who wants to get his hair cut before arresting the thieves.

When Homer overhears the robbers planning to leave town, he decides to "bring them in." Aroma holds the robbers at bay while Homer collects their guns. Then Homer marches the robbers to the sheriff. Aroma becomes a local tourist attraction, so Homer no longer has to worry that his parents will make him get rid of her.

In "The Case of the Cosmic Comic," Homer's friends, Freddy and Louis, both worship a comic book hero named Super-Duper. Homer, however, is unimpressed with Super-Duper because he feels all the stories are make-believe and very similar.

The next Saturday the three boys go into town to see the Super-Duper, who is appearing in person at a showing of one of his movies, but the Super-Duper tells the boys he is too busy to show them his super powers. On the way home from the movie, the boys witness the Super-Duper driving his car into a ditch. Super-Duper cries out in pain when he gets caught on a barbed-wire fence and enlists the boys' assistance in pulling his car out of the ditch. The boys realize that the Super-Duper has no special powers. The story ends with them planning to trade their Super-Duper comic books before the truth gets out.

At the beginning of the third story, "The Doughnuts," Uncle Ulysses asks Homer to finish setting up the new doughnut machine while he goes off to the barber shop. Customers come in to wait while Homer is working. One of the customers, a wealthy lady, insists on making a large amount of doughnut batter for Homer. When Homer cannot get the machine to turn off, he sends for Uncle Ulysses.

After Uncle Ulysses arrives, Mr. Gabby, a customer who is an advertising man, offers to advertise the overstocked doughnuts. Soon afterward, the wealthy woman returns to search for her diamond bracelet.

They all realize the bracelet is in a doughnut. Homer asks Mr. Gabby to advertise that whoever finds the bracelet in a doughnut wins the hundred dollars that the wealthy woman is offering as a reward. People rush to buy all the doughnuts, and the bracelet is found and returned.

In "Mystery Yarn," Homer's Uncle Telly and the sheriff are both dating the same woman, Miss Terwilliger. Both men collect string as a hobby. When a judge comes to ask the two men to unravel their string in a contest for a local fair, the suitors decide that whoever has the most string wins the exclusive right to date Miss Terwilliger.

Miss Terwilliger, who has apparently learned of the agreement, also enters the contest because she does not want the matter decided for her. A talented knitter, Miss Terwilliger has her own large string ball, which is composed mainly of yarn. As the contest progresses, Uncle Telly appears to be the winner. But while most people are watching Telly, Miss Terwilliger pulls a trick. She has worn two knit dresses. She secretly unravels the top dress to add to her string ball, and she wins the contest. In the end she marries Uncle Telly, but only because she chooses him.

In "Nothing New under the Sun (Hardly)," a strange man comes to Centerburg. The people of the town are curious about the man, partly because they think he resembles Rip Van Winkle. The sheriff asks Homer to find out who the stranger is, since the man does not like to talk to adults. When Homer finds out the man is Michael Murphy, a recluse who has lived for thirty years in the mountains while working on a musical mousetrap, the mayor decides to hire Mr. Murphy to remove mice in the town.

After Mr. Murphy finishes collecting the mice, the sheriff charges Murphy thirty dollars for a new car license, the same amount Murphy is paid for his mouse removal services. As Murphy leads the mice out of town, the librarian realizes the man is more like the Pied Piper than Rip Van Winkle. The sheriff races to stop the crowd of children following Mr. Murphy, but the children ignore him and keep

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watching Mr. Murphy's invention with fascination. The sheriff gives Mr. Murphy back the thirty dollars and demands that he "let them go," referring to the children. A startled Mr. Murphy turns the music off, releases the mice, and drives away. Homer arrives and tells the sheriff the children did not stop because their ears had been stuffed with cotton to prevent Mr. Murphy from marching the children away.

The final story, "Wheels of Progress," explains how Uncle Ulysses persuades Miss Enders, the wealthy woman from "The Doughnuts" story and the descendent of the founder of Centerburg, to use the most modern technology to build her new housing development of one hundred and one homes. Once finished, the houses look so much alike the residents have to count from the Enders' Homestead to find their homes. The erection of street signs is delayed when Uncle Ulysses argues over wages with Dulcey Dooner, the Street Sign Putter Upper.

On the day of the local pageant, Ulysses concedes to Dulcey's demands, which is also the day that the Homestead is moved because Miss Enders feels it looks out of place. When the pageant is over, the residents cannot find their homes because Dulcey has not put the signs up and the Homestead has been replaced with another house. Homer finally finds Dulcey drunk from having imbibed in a hundred-year-old keg of cough medicine unearthed when the Homestead was moved.

After the street signs are put up, the town moves the Homestead back to its original location to avoid future confusion.

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 sheriff and Uncle Telly upset when Miss Terwilliger enters the world champion string saver contest?

The men have two reasons to be worried. One is that they are afraid Miss Terwilliger has heard of their arrangement that the winner of the contest will win the exclusive right to court Miss Terwilliger. Another reason is that if Miss Terwilliger wins the contest, the matter of Miss Terwilliger's marriage could remain unresolved for a long time. In addition, both men seem to have objections to the propriety of a woman participating in the contest.

Literary Analysis

What kind of person is the sheriff of Centerburg?

The sheriff is a kindly man, but he has a rather casual attitude towards his job. When the robbers steal the prize money, he decides they have gotten away after only a brief search. When Homer calls to say that he has found the robbers, the sheriff tells Homer to wait until he is finished getting his haircut. The sheriff also sends Homer to discover the identity of a potentially dangerous stranger when Mr. Murphy comes to town. When events do occur that need immediate action, the sheriff often gets so excited that he jumbles his words together. Despite this, the sheriff does make an effort to keep Centerburg safe. When he believes the children are threatened by Mr. Murphy, he takes action to save them.

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Inferential Comprehension

What is the most likely reason that Aunt Agnes objects to Uncle Ulysses frittering away so much of his time?

Instead of staying at the lunch room and helping out, Uncle Ulysses spends a lot of time at the barbershop playing card games and listening to gossip. When Aunt Agnes needs help with the daily business of the lunch room, she has to send someone to look for him. Also, when emergencies occur, such as the doughnut machine malfunctioning, Uncle Ulysses is not there to take care of the problem.

Constructing Meaning

What is the main idea of this collection of stories?

This collection of stories seems to serve the purpose of showing the colorful characters and history of Centerburg when Homer Price is a young boy. The stories also serve to show that Homer is a clever boy who possesses excellent problem-solving skills. For example, Homer suggests how to advertise the excess doughnuts, and he captures the robbers when the sheriff is busy.

sheriff get Miss Terwilliger to hasten her choice for a husband with the world's champion string saver contest. Have the students think of a problem and attempt to come up with a contest that might provide a solution for the problem. If possible, have the students hold their contests and assess whether they got the results they desired.

Making Predictions Uncle Ulysses is very interested in new inventions, but things sometimes go wrong when he introduces new appliances in his lunch room. When this book was published in 1943, many of the appliances we have today had not yet been invented. Have the students choose a recent invention and write a story about what might happen if Uncle Ulysses were to introduce this invention in his lunch room.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting All of these stories are set in or near the colorful town of Centerburg. Have the students draw a map of the town showing some of the important landmarks mentioned in this book. Have them discuss how small towns have changed over the years.

Understanding the Main Idea Robert McCloskey provides detailed illustrations for most of the important events in this book. Have the students write captions for all of the pictures in one of the stories. The captions should capture the central thought of the illustrations in a short statement.

Recognizing Cause and Effect On two separate occasions, the people of Centerburg solve a problem with the help of a contest. Homer helps his uncle and Miss Enders this way in the story about the doughnuts, and Uncle Telly and the