

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Light on Hogback Hill by Cynthia DeFelice

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## Book Information

Cynthia DeFelice, The Light on Hogback Hill

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Macmillan, 1993

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139 Pages

Book Level: 4.6

Interest Level: MG

A girl befriends and learns the truth about the deformed recluse she had previously feared.

**Topics:** Disabilities, Physical; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Mysteries, Misc./Other

## Main Characters

Angus Tull Netta's brother, who brings supplies to his sister and tells the children of Possum Hollow scary stories to keep them from going up Hogback Hill

Dr. Carter Josh's dad and Hadley's dentist

Hadley Patterson one of the two main characters in the book; a sixth-grader who spends a lot of time alone in her house, and is intrigued by the light she sometime sees atop Hogback Hill

Henrietta Tull (Netta) an elderly woman who lives alone at the top of Hogback Hill

Josh Carter the other main character in the book; Hadley's new friend who is new to Possum Hollow, and who convinces Hadley to investigate Hogback Hill with him

Mrs. Carter Josh's mom

Mrs. Patterson Hadley's mother, who works long hours and has no social life

Simon Carter Josh's younger brother, who loves to tell "bad" riddles

## Vocabulary

**atomizer** a container that delivers medicine or other liquid as a fine spray

**brusquely** harshly

**deductive** logical

**dementedly** insanely

**hunchback** a person with a humpback

## Synopsis

Sixth-grader Hadley Patterson lives with her mother in the small town of Possum Hollow. Hadley's mother has few friends and works long hours at her job. Since her husband deserted her years before, she is afraid of getting involved with other people. Hadley is lonely because her mother is not home much and her best friend has moved away.

Hadley becomes friends with Josh Carter, a new student at Possum Hollow School. Hadley tells Josh about Angus Tull, an old man who lives in town. Angus has told the children of Possum Hollow many stories about the hag of Hogback Hill, who reportedly turns people into cats. Hadley also tells Josh about the light on the top of Hogback Hill, which she can see from her bedroom window. Josh decides to discover the truth for himself, and convinces Hadley to join him in investigating Hogback Hill.

At the top of the hill, Hadley and Josh discover a small cabin and meet Henrietta (Netta) Tull. Netta, who is Angus's sister, has lived alone in her cabin on the hill for fifty-seven years. Hadley and Josh befriend Netta and begin to visit her regularly, despite Angus's warnings to stay away. Netta tells them the story of how she came to live on Hogback Hill, following a car accident that left her with a spinal deformity. When Angus dies, Josh and Hadley bring the news to Netta and offer their help.

When Hadley's mother hears about Netta, Mrs. Patterson realizes that, in an attempt to shield herself from pain, she has isolated herself almost as much as Netta has. By the end of the book, Netta has come down off the hill, and Mrs. Patterson begins to get to know some of the people in Possum Hollow.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

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## Initial Understanding

Why did Angus encourage Netta to move into the cabin?

*He felt guilty for causing her injury, he didn't want to be reminded of her pain, he wanted to protect her from pain, and he thought he was helping her.*

## Literary Analysis

After being over at Josh's house for dinner, what did Hadley realize about her home life?

*It would be nice to have a brother or sister, and it would be nice to have a dad and mom at home, but she would not have as much freedom if her family was like Josh's.*

## Inferential Comprehension

How were Mrs. Patterson and Netta alike?

*They both kept to themselves and avoided getting to know people, they both had been rejected by someone in their past, and they both found the courage to change their behavior.*

## Constructing Meaning

Hadley and Josh react differently when they hear the tales of the hag of Hogback Hill. Think of a time when you reacted to some unusual news. Was your reaction more like Hadley's or Josh's? Why?

*Responses will differ. Hadley was afraid and tried to avoid the thing she feared. Josh was skeptical and took steps to discover the truth of the matter for himself.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Literary Features** This story is about friendships and accepting people as they are. Have the students identify events in the story that demonstrate friendship and acceptance and contrast them to events that demonstrate people being unfriendly and judgmental.

**Understanding Characterization** As a class discussion, have the students identify the

personality traits of several of the characters in *The Light on Hogback Hill*. (For instance, Angus Tull is unfriendly, curt, threatening, short tempered, etc.) Choose a scene from the book and assign characters. After giving them time to think about their character's personality and interaction with others, have the students act out the scene and then ad lib for several minutes. Have the class evaluate their performances. When they were ad libbing, did the characters stay in character? Why or why not?

**Making Predictions** As they read the book, have the students keep a log of events that occur in each chapter. (For example, one event that occurs in the first chapter is that Hadley meets Josh.) At the end of each chapter, have the students record their predictions of what will happen. (At the end of chapter one, do they predict Hadley will become friends with Josh?) After finishing the book, have the students go back and evaluate their predictions. How accurate were they? Did they pay attention to the details in the story when making their predictions?

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Have the students identify places in the story where persuasive language is used. (e.g., Josh persuades Hadley to explore Hogback Hill with him, Hadley persuades her mother to meet Josh's parents, etc.) Divide the students into small groups and have them write a skit involving persuasion. Allow the students to perform the skits for the class. Have the other students identify the persuasive language used and evaluate its effectiveness in the skit.