

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Meet Josefina, an American Girl

by
Valerie Tripp

Book Information

Valerie Tripp, Meet Josefina, an American Girl

Quiz Number: 17632

Pleasant Company, 1997

ISBN 1-56247-515-0; LCCN

83 Pages

Book Level: 4.1

Interest Level: MG

Nine-year-old Josefina, the youngest of four sisters living in New Mexico in 1824, tries to help run the household after her mother's death.

Topics: Family Life, Aunts; Family Life, Death; Family Life, Sisters; Places, Farms; Popular Groupings, Historical Fiction; Series, American Girl; U.S. States/Regions, New Mexico

Main Characters

Abuelito Josefina's grandfather; he travels with a caravan for six months at a time between his home in Santa Fe and Mexico City

Ana Josefina's oldest sister; she is married and has children but also assumes a motherly role with her three younger sisters

Clara Montoya Josefina's twelve-year-old sister; she often argues with Francisca

Florecita the meanest goat of the family herd; she frightens Josefina

Francisca Montoya Josefina's fifteen-year-old sister; she is self-centered and often argues with her sister Clara

Josefina Montoya the nine-year-old main character of the story who longs for life to be the way it was when her mother was alive; she tries to find the courage to stand up to the mean family goat

Mamá Josefina's deceased mother

Papá Josefina's father; he runs their rancho and is sad over the loss of his wife

Tía Dolores Josefina's aunt, who is the sister of Josefina's deceased mother; she comes to the rancho from Mexico City and brings joy to the Montoya family

Vocabulary

caravan a procession of travelers journeying together, often for safety in a hostile region

elegant graceful or dignified

lurched pulled forward suddenly and unsteadily

sauntered strolled or walked leisurely

sorrow sadness or grief

Synopsis

Josefina Montoya is a nine-year-old girl who lives with her father and three older sisters on their rancho near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Josefina misses her mother, who died a year ago, and the family is still dealing with the sorrow of her death. Two of Josephina's older sisters, Francisca and Clara, always seem to be arguing about little things. Her oldest sister, Ana, who is married and has two children of her own, has become a motherly worrier. Her father, Papá, has become especially quiet.

The girls' grandfather, Abuelito, is a trader who lives in Santa Fe. He travels for six months at a time with a caravan to Mexico City to trade his goods for other supplies. Josefina and her sisters are excited because his caravan is expected to arrive at the rancho from Mexico City any day now. The arrival of the caravan is the most exciting thing that happens on the rancho. Not only does it bring Abuelito home safely, but the wagons bring wonderful treasures.

One morning, Josefina and her sisters are at the stream doing laundry when the oldest, meanest goat of the family's herd, Florecita, approaches. Josefina is not a brave girl, and she is afraid of Florecita. When Florecita approaches Josefina in search of the freshly picked primroses Josefina has in her pouch, Josefina backs away and falls into the stream, spilling the bouquet. Florecita immediately devours the primroses, making Josefina wish she had the courage to stand up to the bad-tempered goat.

The sisters spend that afternoon preparing a fandango, a celebration for the arrival of the

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Meet Josefina, an American Girl

by
Valerie Tripp

caravan. Suddenly they hear the approaching caravan with its mules, wooden wagons, animals, and people. The girls rush out to greet the caravan and find Abuelito. They discover that Abuelito has brought their mother's sister, Tía Dolores, from Mexico City. She greets the girls graciously and comes in for a cool drink. Josefina notices that though Tía Dolores is quite different from her mother, their laughter is very similar. The family members laugh and chat and then go outside to see the piano that Tía Dolores had Abuelito bring from Mexico City. Tía Dolores plays a tune, and Josefina is enthralled at the sound of the beautiful music. Josefina decides to give Tía Dolores a gift in return for her gift of beautiful music. She carefully gathers the last of the flowers in the garden that Mamá planted, making sure that the roots are left in the garden undisturbed. She makes a beautiful bouquet of the flowers to give to Tía Dolores when Papá introduces her aunt to friends and neighbors at the fandango.

That night, as the fandango is about to begin, Josefina notices her sisters are getting along better. When it is time for the presentation of the bouquet, Josefina runs to get it from under the bench where she has hidden it. She discovers, though, that Florecita has eaten the bouquet and ruined the roots in the garden. Josefina is so furious that she pulls Florecita by the horns into the goat's pen. Tía Dolores finds Josefina and reassures her that the garden will live. She also says that in the morning she will help Josefina plant seeds that she has brought from Mexico City. Josefina feels comforted and suddenly realizes that she found the courage to stand up to Florecita.

The next day, Tía Dolores gives the girls special gifts that she has brought from Mexico City. The sisters realize that Tía Dolores has been very helpful in teaching them how to do things and that it has been very nice having her with them. They go together to ask Papá to ask her to stay with them for awhile. Papá says he will consider it. The next morning, the girls are disappointed when they see Tía Dolores's trunk loaded on Abuelito's wagon. Since Abuelito is leaving for Santa Fe, they assume

that Tía Dolores is going with him. They are relieved when Tía Dolores explains that she is going to Abuelito's for only a short time to see her mother and then will return to the rancho. The story ends with Josefina hurrying to water the flowers that Tía Dolores helped to plant in the garden so they will be beautiful when her aunt returns.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why is the flower garden that Florecita ruins so important to Josefina?

The garden was planted by Mamá in the back courtyard of the rancho. Mamá had cared for the garden with great devotion because it had been started from seeds sent by Tía Dolores in Mexico City. Since Mamá's death, Josefina has been caring for the garden out of love and respect for her mother and as a way for Josefina to continue to feel Mamá's presence in her life.

Literary Analysis

Why is it so difficult for Josefina to deal with her mother's death?

Josefina remembers how Mamá brought out the best in all of the girls. When her sisters argue, Josefina remembers how Mamá would have fixed things. Also, her mother protected her from danger and taught all of the girls how to perform household duties. Finally, the empty longing she sees in her sisters and father makes her sad, too.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Meet Josefina, an American Girl

by
Valerie Tripp

Inferential Comprehension

Josefina tells herself Mamá would approve of using the last of the flowers for Tía Dolores. Would Mamá approve of Tía Dolores staying with the family for a while? Why or why not?

Soon after Tía Dolores arrives, the family seems more cheerful and the feuding sisters begin to get along much better. Mamá would probably be happy to see that Tía Dolores is able to make such a difference in their lives and would approve of her returning for a while.

Constructing Meaning

How does Josefina convince her sisters that Tía Dolores might stay at the rancho if she were asked?

Francisca thinks that Tía Dolores is used to living in a large city with grand people and houses, but Josefina tells her sisters that Tía Dolores does not act in a proud manner or put on any fancy airs. Josefina also tells them that Tía Dolores loved hearing Abuelito's stories about the rancho when he was visiting her in Mexico City. When Ana points out that Tía Dolores may be hoping to start a family, Josefina declares that the Montoya children are Tía Dolores's family since she is their aunt. By making these points, Josefina is able to persuade them that Tía Dolores should at least be asked if she would stay for a few months.

Teachable Skills

Responding to Literature Josefina keeps a little wooden box that was her mother's. She calls it a memory box because she keeps small things in it that remind her of her mother. Have the students create their own memory boxes. They can use a shoe box or any other type of box, cover it with plain paper, and draw a design on the outside. Have them put things in the box that remind them of someone they know. If objects are not readily available, pictures of objects can be used. The contents of the boxes can remain private or be shown to the class. Each student should write a paragraph describing how they decided which objects to include.

Recognizing Setting Abuelito travels more than one thousand miles from Santa Fe to Mexico City along the Camino Real. Provide each student with a map of the United States and Mexico. Have them trace the route that Abuelito took. Have half of the class research and write an accompanying report on the history of Santa Fe, New Mexico, to learn when the city was founded and its heritage and culture. Have the other half of the class research and write an accompanying report on the history of Mexico City, including the date of its founding and its heritage and culture. Assign each team to give a presentation of its finding to the other team.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The story is rich with Spanish words and even provides a brief glossary of terms in the back. Have the students create a set of ten or twelve flash cards containing words from the glossary. Have them write the Spanish words on one side and the English translation on the other side. Have students study the cards, form teams, and then compete in a game in which they are quizzed on spelling, pronunciation, and definitions.

Making Inferences Abuelito faces many dangers as the caravan travels between Santa Fe and New Mexico. Josefina and her family always look forward to hearing the stories he tells about his travels. Have each student write a story that Abuelito could have told about one of his experiences with the caravan. The story should include a danger he might have encountered, such as robbers, wild animals, sandstorms, floods, deserts, hunger, etc. The stories can then be read to the class.