

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Snow Treasure

by

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Book Information

Marie McSwigan, Snow Treasure

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Book Level: 5.3

Interest Level: MG

In 1940, when the Nazi invasion of Norway reaches their village, twelve-year-old Peter & his friends use their sleds to transport nine million dollars worth of gold past the German soldiers to the harbor ready to take the gold for safekeeping in the US.

Award: SLJ Best Book

Topics: Adventure, Escape; Countries/Regions, Norway; Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Fru and Mr. Holm owners of the farm where the children seek food and shelter after sledding

Jan Lasek a young Pole who is forced to serve in the Nazi army and risks his life to save Peter in exchange for a chance for freedom

Lars Lundstrom Peter's father, who leaves Riswyk to fight against the Germans

Michael Berg, Helga Thomsen Peter's friends, who help him transport the gold on sleds to the Snake

Mrs. Lundstrom Peter's mother, who bravely helps the children carry out their important task

Per Garson the Lundstrom family's servant, who loads the gold onto the children's sleds

Peter Lundstrom a twelve-year-old Norwegian boy who leads the children in taking Norway's gold bullion to safety from the Nazis

the Commandant a strict German commander who despises the Norwegians and narrowly misses discovering the plot to remove the gold bullion

Victor Lundstrom Peter's favorite uncle, who masterminds the efforts to save the gold

Vocabulary

fiord an inlet from the sea that is long and narrow, often with steep cliffs

gold bullion gold used as money, but in the form of bars rather than coins

konditeri a pastry shop

kroner Norway's basic unit of money

quarantine forced isolation because of disease

Synopsis

Snow Treasure tells the story of how the people of a small Norwegian village are able to fool the Nazi soldiers who occupy their land. The Norwegians very cleverly use their children and their sleds to transport the country's gold bullion reserves down a mountainside to a waiting freighter.

The band of children have been inspired by Victor Lundstrom, a fisherman who owns and operates a fleet of vessels for personal and government use. Victor has traveled the world, and when he returns home to Riswyk, he entertains his nephew, Peter, and the rest of the children with stories of his many adventures.

When the German soldiers finally occupy a beach area near their village, the people of Riswyk, led by Victor and his brother, Lars, devise a plan to remove Norway's gold so the Germans will not be able to use it to harm their country.

Victor suggests that the German's suspicions would not be aroused by older children sledding down the hillside to the Snake. He appeals to the children's sense of patriotism to enlist their aid in transporting the gold on their sleds.

All goes well until the very last load of bullion is taken down to the Snake. A Nazi search party almost discovers some of the buried gold, but Peter's quick action distracts them. Peter is chased and captured and then imprisoned in the Nazis' barracks. A run-away German soldier, who is sympathetic to the children, helps Peter escape to his Uncle Victor's waiting ship. In exchange for saving Peter's life, the young soldier, Jan Lasek, is given passage to America aboard the "Cleng Peerson."

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The story ends with Peter beginning to realize that his life will change since he will also be going to America to live in freedom.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Which events from the story best show how well the Norwegian people were able to get the better of the Nazis who occupied their country?

Answers might include how the children are able to remain completely mute in the presence of the Germans despite their fear; or how the children are able to hide the gold under the snow but make it easy to find by building a snowman over each pile; or how they make the Germans believe there is an epidemic affecting the small children so classes would not resume again.

Literary Analysis

In many regards, this story could be considered a modern legend of Norway. There is no evidence to support the story, yet many people believe it is true. What parts of the story do you think are the most believable, and what parts are not?

Students may find Jan Lasek's story believable, in light of what the Nazis did to gain control of Poland. They may also point out the Nazi imposed curfew or the practice air-raid drills as believable aspects of war. On the other hand, they may assert that Jan Lasek's rescue of Peter from the Nazi barracks is an unbelievable event in the story.

Inferential Comprehension

Jan Lasek's story, which is probably very similar to those of other young Polish men, seems to have a significant effect on Peter. How and why do you think Jan's experiences with the Nazis affect Peter?

The Nazis, in overrunning Poland, devastate the country and the lives of its people. Peter seems to understand Jan's pain and is more willing to accept Jan's claim of innocence concerning spying on the children. Perhaps Peter is more willing to believe his story because he is grateful that his own life is still intact despite the Nazis' presence.

Constructing Meaning

Peter puts his own life in danger by hitting the German Commandant with a snowball to prevent him from discovering the buried gold bullion. It is a brave act that gets him imprisoned at the German barracks. How would you have reacted if you were in a situation like Peter's? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary but might include reacting in the same heroic manner despite the danger because it would benefit the whole country; or students might say that the risk would be too great and they would have done nothing in the same situation.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting This story takes place in Norway. Have students locate Norway on a map. Ask them to note the many fiords. Ask them to find a location in a fiord where the Germans could have landed. Have them determine how far they had to travel to get there. Then ask them to map the best route for Victor to take to America.

Understanding the Author's Craft The author tells this story from the Norwegian people's point of view. Have your students consider the viewpoint of one of the German soldiers who was sent to Riswyk in the winter of 1940. Then have them write a diary entry from that soldier's viewpoint.

Extending Meaning Peter and the other children save the gold bullion by taking the bricks down

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the mountain to the fiord on their sleds. Have your students re-enact this feat by loading comparable weight onto a sled or wagon and pulling it. Then have them debate the story's realism and whether or not these small children could have done such a feat.

Recognizing Details The success of the mission to save Norway's gold bullion depends on being able to hide the "Cleng Peerson" on the Snake. Have your students draw and color their version of the camouflaged Norwegian freighter after rereading the end of chapter twenty.