

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Thimble Summer

by

### Elizabeth Enright

### Book Information

Elizabeth Enright, Thimble Summer

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136 Pages

Book Level: 5.7

Interest Level: MG

Nine-year-old Garnet Linden believes the silver thimble she found by the river has brought luck to her whole family.

**Award:** Newbery Medal

**Topics:** Places, Farms; U.S. States/Regions, Wisconsin

### Main Characters

Citronella Hauser Garnet's placid, chubby, eleven-year-old friend, who often joins Garnet's adventures

Donald Linden Garnet's very young brother, who likes to make messes

Eric Swanstrom the thirteen-year-old orphan who comes to live with the Lindens after a hard year of hitchhiking across the country looking for a home

Garnet Linden a spirited nine-year-old farm girl who often gets into trouble when she goes off on adventures; she sometimes has difficulty dealing with her older brother Jay

Jay Linden Garnet's older eleven-year-old brother who does not want to be a farmer when he grows up; he is sometimes impatient with Garnet

Miss Pentland the librarian who accidentally locks Garnet and Citronella in the library

Mr. and Mrs. Earl Zangl the couple who gives Garnet a ride when she is running away from home

Mr. and Mrs. Hauser Citronella's parents, who are friends of Garnet's parents and help the Lindens on threshing day

Mr. Freebody Garnet's neighbor who has watched out for her since she was very small; he helps her prepare her pig to be shown at the fair

Mr. Linden Garnet's father, who worries that his crops will be destroyed when there is a drought; he takes care of Eric by bringing him to live on his farm

Mrs. Fanny Eberhardt Citronella's elderly great-grandmother, who entertains the girls by telling stories about her childhood

Mrs. Linden Garnet's mother, who spends much of her time taking care of Garnet's younger brother, Donald

the truck driver the man who gives Garnet a ride home from New Conniston

### Vocabulary

**drought** a long period of dry weather

**jaunt** a short trip made for fun

**kiln** an oven used for burning, drying, or firing

**puny** pitifully small or unimportant

**scowling** having a frowning, displeased look

**thimble** a small cap or cover worn on a finger to protect the finger from a needle

### Synopsis

Nine-year-old Garnet Linden is worried about a severe drought that threatens her family's farm. She and her brother Jay get some relief from the heat by going swimming in the river. There Garnet finds a silver thimble that she thinks is magic, but Jay is skeptical. As the children walk home, Jay declares that he does not want to be a farmer and deal with a farmer's troubles. That night Garnet wakes up to the sound of rain, and she runs outside with Jay to celebrate.

Several days later Garnet visits her friend Citronella Hauser. Citronella's great-grandmother, Mrs. Eberhardt, tells the girls about an incident that occurred when she was a young girl. Garnet is impressed by the story and wishes that she had a great-grandmother. When Garnet goes home she finds that her father has been given a loan to replace their old, sagging barn.

Garnet is allowed to join her father and brother at night in the woods where a kiln is processing lime

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for the new barn. Garnet enjoys preparing supper for the men, and she rests as her father converses with Mr. Freebody, a friend of the family. The stillness is broken, however, when Mr. Freebody's dog growls at a stranger approaching in the darkness. The Lindens discover that the stranger is just a young runaway boy who is obviously hungry. After he eats a quick meal, the boy introduces himself as Eric Swanstrom. He says that he has been traveling across the country since his father died. Garnet's father persuades Eric to help the Lindens build the barn.

As the summer progresses, Garnet develops a respect for Eric. At the same time, though, she becomes frustrated with her brother's tendency to shut her out when Eric is around. One day she is bored and persuades Citronella to go with her to the library. They hitch a ride with Mr. Freebody and spend the afternoon reading. Suddenly they realize the library is very quiet. Citronella finds that the girls have been locked in the library. After the girls realize that the library will be closed the next day, they eat a chocolate bar they find in the librarian's desk. Several hours pass before the girls hear Mr. Freebody calling them. When they respond, he gets Miss Pentland, the librarian, to unlock the door, and the girls eat at a lunch wagon before going home.

In August Mr. Linden rents a threshing machine from Mr. Hauser to harvest his oats. Many people come to help the Lindens. Garnet is in the fields with Mr. Freebody and Eric when Mr. Freebody leaves her in charge of part of the threshing machine. When Eric goes to get a drink, she dozes and the pile of straw capsizes on her. She is just recovering when Jay appears and yells at her for making a mess. Outraged, Garnet storms home, changes her clothes, grabs her purse, and decides to run away. At the highway she hitches a ride.

A married couple gives her a ride in their car. Although the couple is going to Hodgeville, Garnet has decided to go to New Conniston, a town eighteen miles away. As they drop Garnet off, they introduce themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Zangl and tell Garnet to look for them at the fair when it comes.

Garnet has fifty cents in her pocket, so she spends a dime on a bus so she can ride the rest of the way to New Conniston. In New Conniston, Garnet goes on a spending spree buying presents for her family. As she is about to buy herself a second hot dog, she suddenly realizes that she is out of money with no way to get home and no gift for Eric. She hitches a ride home with a truck driver who is transporting chickens.

As the truck passes through Hodgeville, a crate of chickens falls off the truck. Garnet helps to capture the chickens and makes a special effort to catch a black hen. As they continue on the way home, she and the driver discuss the upcoming fair and how she might enter her pet pig Timmy there. When the driver drops Garnet off, he insists that she take the black hen. Garnet plans to give it to Eric. As she is walking home, Mr. Freebody intercepts her and scolds her for always getting into mischief. He tells her that while her parents have been too busy to notice she was gone, they will be very upset when they are told. He advises her to wait several days when things are calmer before she tells them.

In early September, Mr. Freebody drives Garnet, Citronella, and Timmy to the fair. Garnet leaves Timmy at the swine pavilion and explores the fair with Citronella. They eat, enjoy the rides, and visit with the Zangls. When the girls see Mrs. Linden, Mrs. Linden reminds Garnet that the stock judging will begin in half an hour. The girls decide to take a quick ride on the Ferris wheel, but it gets stuck and Garnet misses Timmy's judging. When Garnet finally arrives, she finds that Timmy has won a blue ribbon with Mr. Freebody's help.

Later, Eric says he wants to buy a farm next to the Lindens. When Jay repeats that he does not want to be a farmer, Eric says that Jay does not appreciate his good fortune because he has never seen real trouble. Jay replies that he would first like to travel and then maybe come back and farm with Eric. Garnet shares her views about life with Eric when she shows him the silver thimble and explains how it has brought her family luck that summer.

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### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

How does Garnet react when Jay yells at her for letting the straw spill?

*Garnet feels angry that Jay was so mean to her. She is already upset about letting the straw spill, and Jay makes her feel worse. She is offended that Jay talks to her as if she were a baby. The incident makes her feel unsociable and unwanted, and she feels a strong need to get away from everyone she knows.*

#### Literary Analysis

How does the mood of this story change when Garnet meets Mr. Freebody as she is returning from New Conniston?

*As Garnet approaches Mr. Freebody, there is a combined feeling of relief that Garnet got safely home and triumph that Garnet's trip turned out so well. When Mr. Freebody is silent, the mood begins to change. At first, the reader waits in suspense to see why Mr. Freebody is silent. Then the mood turns to shame as Mr. Freebody recounts times when Garnet has behaved thoughtlessly and caused others to worry. The mood next changes to surprise as Mr. Freebody tells Garnet that no one knows she is missing. Finally, the mood returns to relief and amusement as Mr. Freebody forgives Garnet.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

When Mrs. Eberhardt's father heard what his daughter had done on her birthday, why did he say she had been punishing herself all day long?

*Mrs. Eberhardt had had many disappointing and frightening experiences throughout the day. She gave herself a blister walking to town only to find out her bracelet was already gone. Then she had to walk a long way home in the dark and was badly frightened by a man who stole her money. When she got home, she was horrified to find out her little brother had gotten lost because she had not stayed with him. She then spent the rest of the evening feeling guilty for letting her brother suffer.*

#### Constructing Meaning

How did you feel when Eric said that Jay had not seen trouble?

*Some readers might have felt surprised that Eric spoke so strongly to Jay. Others may have felt that Jay had seen bad things happen and did not deserve to be spoken to this way. Some students, however, may have felt that Jay needed to have someone make him appreciate what he had. Eric had to face true hardships on his own, while Jay had a loving family and a good home.*

### Teachable Skills

**Describing Actions or Events** Garnet thinks she would have had a better story to tell her grandchildren if the girls had not been rescued from the library until the next morning. Telling a story so that it maintains a listener's attention takes thought and preparation. The storyteller must carefully select details, create colorful verbal images, and build suspense. Have the students choose one of Garnet's adventures in this book, prepare an outline, and rehearse it. Then have them tell it to the class just as Mrs. Eberhardt tells her adventures to Garnet and Citronella.

**Recognizing Setting** Garnet lives in a small community, but she manages to travel to several places. Have the students create a map showing the places described in this story. Ask students to

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mark on their maps the different places where Garnet has her adventures. Have students discuss how changes in society have led to greater opportunities for today's youth to travel.

**Understanding the Main Idea** This story is a collection of the many different things that happen to Garnet during one summer. Have students choose two or three different chapters and identify what they believe to be the main idea of each chapter. Have them discuss their ideas in class.

**Recognizing Cause and Effect** Each of Garnet's adventures causes something to happen. Have students choose one adventure and write what events occur because of this adventure. Have students use details from the book to support their ideas.