

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Tucket's Gold

by
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Book Information

Gary Paulsen, Tucket's Gold
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Fifteen-year-old Francis and the two children he has adopted travel across the Old West, evade Comancheros, discover a treasure, and wind up rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Award: Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Adventure, Danger; Adventure, Travel; History, Frontier/Pioneer Life; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Series, Tucket Adventures

Main Characters

Billy Lottie's brother, a seven-year-old orphan boy who grows up quickly

Courtweiller and Dubs ruthless men who try to rob Francis, Lottie, and Billy

Francis Tucket the principal character of the story; a responsible fifteen-year-old boy who is in charge of two children while traveling in the open West; he has learned to survive in a hostile environment while searching for his parents

Kashi a thirty-five-year old Pueblo elder who befriends Francis

Lottie a ten-year-old, talkative, resourceful orphan girl who travels with Francis

Mr. Jason Grimes a one-armed mountain man who rescues Francis, Lottie, and Billy from the Comancheros

Two Toes a Pueblo Indian who teaches Billy the art of bow hunting

Vocabulary

arroyo a steep-sided gully eroded by heavy rains

callused having a thickened and hardened outer layer of skin

clout a piece of cloth worn as a covering around the waist

mesquite a small shrub or tree native to western North America

mirage an illusion caused by the distortion of light between hot and cooler layers of air

picket line a rope used to tether animals together

shift a loose fitting dress that drops straight from the shoulder

tedious tiresome or boring

Synopsis

It is the mid-1800's, and fifteen-year-old Francis Tucket is traveling in the southwestern United States on foot with a ten-year-old girl, Lottie, and her seven-year-old brother, Billy. They have just escaped a band of Comancheros with the help of the one-armed mountain man, Jason Grimes. Grimes had taken the children's horses west in the hope the Comancheros would follow him, and the children had fled north on foot, trying to avoid detection. While walking across the parched earth they see a dust cloud and fear the Comancheros are pursuing them. They reach the safety of a line of trees by a dry gulch before a huge thundercloud bursts forth with rain and hail. They are grateful that the rain has erased their tracks and that they now have drinking water. They follow the gulch until Francis kills a deer that evening. There they rest for a couple of days while they make moccasins for their journey.

They set out again and in the evening, while preparing their beds under a stone ledge, Billy unearths a skull. Examining the area more closely, Francis finds a Spanish helmet and sword, the rest of the skeleton, and gold and silver bars. Francis realizes they must rebury the gold, for they would never be able to carry it out on foot. He finds a safe place and reburies it, taking only a couple of bars to carry. They set out in the morning and shortly thereafter come upon tracks of a group of horses. They walk cautiously until they find six ponies tethered together. Francis guesses they had

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become frightened and run from the storm a few days back. The children untangle the horses and find them affectionate and trained. Then they head back for the gold that they had buried. Once the treasure is recovered, they head down the streambed on horseback, this time being able to cover many more miles.

The following morning they see what appears to be a castle in the clouds. As they get closer they realize it is actually a village on a butte. The children make a cold camp that evening, and Francis goes scouting towards the butte at dark. While lying on the edge of a gully, he gets bitten by a snake. He awakens two weeks later in a house in an Indian village on the butte. Lottie explains how the Indians helped him and how Billy was fast becoming an Indian while playing with the village boys. The children stay with the Pueblo Indians and work at their daily tasks alongside them. Although tempted to stay in the village, Francis is drawn north, and the children set out with him again.

At that night's camp, Lottie is cooking a turkey Billy shot with a bow and arrow while Francis and Billy go out scouting. As Francis is heading back to camp, he is knocked unconscious. When he regains consciousness, he finds himself tied up in his camp. He recognizes the culprits as Courtweiler and Dubs, two thieves he had outwitted before. And he discovers that they know about the gold. As they are making threats to kill Francis, an arrow whizzes by and then three more. Dubs is killed, and Courtweiler is wounded. In the meantime, Francis gets his hands free and Lottie throws him his rifle so that he can shoot Courtweiler, who is trying to kill him. The scene sickens Billy, who shot the arrows, and Lottie comforts him while Francis buries the thieves. Francis turns his thoughts to his family and is determined to start out again in the morning looking for them, hoping there will be no more graves along the way.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Are Lottie and Billy a help or a hindrance to Francis?

Probably both. In the beginning of the story, Billy whines frequently and Lottie talks incessantly, which is very annoying to Francis. Francis also feels the additional responsibility of protecting them and providing them with food. However, as time goes on, he begins to enjoy Lottie's companionship. She is a good contributor and anticipates needs. By the end of the story, Billy is also helpful. He was physically carried at the beginning of the story, but by the end he is helping the group rather than being a burden.

Literary Analysis

How does the author foreshadow the appearance of Courtweiler and Dubs at the end of the story?

In chapter eight Francis tells Lottie and Billy that he got his mule from Courtweiler and Dubs, who stole all that he had and left him the mule. Francis currently has his rifle, buckskins, and possibles sack, so the reader knows he recovered his things. The reader is left with a sense that there may be bitter feelings and some type of retaliation is a possibility.

Inferential Comprehension

How might the time spent with the Pueblo Indians help Francis in the future?

Francis learns about farming in a dry climate, about irrigating crops, and about working together as a community. He is with a happy, healthy, generous group of people. When and if Francis gets to Oregon, he can use these observations and skills to form a vital community there. By the consideration Francis was shown by the Indians, he can see the importance of aiding a stranger in need.

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Constructing Meaning

Billy grows up quickly during the time he spends with the Pueblo Indians. Was there a time or period of your life in which you were forced to grow up quickly? What was it and how did it cause you to mature?

Answers will differ. Many students will pinpoint a difficult time in their lives that forced them to grow up quickly, such as a divorce or death in the family. Others may write about a certain experience or adventure they went through, such as a camping trip, a visit to a large city or a foreign country, etc. They should explain how they grew because of the experience.

drawn on one side of each card and the name of the animal on the other. Have students quiz each other with the cards.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Francis is fortunate to have been found by the Pueblo Indians. Have the students learn about this group of peaceful Indians and their way of life. Then, from their research and the descriptions in the story, the students can construct a Pueblo village out of clay. Include the Pueblo dwellings, place of worship, and farm fields in the layout.

Teachable Skills

Responding to Literature When Francis cannot speak with the Pueblo Indians, he uses the sign language he learned from the Pawnee tribe to communicate. The students might enjoy learning some sign language as a tool for communication. Have them learn the alphabet in sign language first, so that they can spell out their names. They could then learn the signs for the words of a favorite song or poem, or learn the signs for common objects in daily life. They could then sign the poem, song, or objects to the class.

Describing Actions or Events Francis almost dies from his snakebite wound. Have the students investigate the indigenous snakes of the southwestern United States and list the poisonous and non-venomous species. They should learn the current first-aid procedure in treating a snakebite. The students can assemble a snake-bite kit and demonstrate the procedure for caring for an individual who is far from medical help and has been bitten by a venomous snake.

Recognizing Details Francis is a good tracker. He is able to tell the horses are unshod and traveling in a tight group. Using a tracking guide or other reference books, have the students learn to identify various animal tracks, especially of species native to their area. Assign students to create a set of flashcards with an animal track