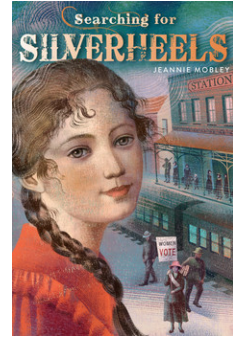


A Curriculum Guide to

Searching for Silverheels

by Jeannie Mobley



About the Book

Pearl's family owns the town café where Pearl entertains the customers by telling them the legend of Silverheels, a beautiful dancer who nursed miners through an epidemic during the Gold Rush in 1861. Every time Pearl tells the story, Josie Gilbert, a member of the National Woman's Party that advocates for women's suffrage, hands out pamphlets and annoys the customers with her rants about a woman's right to vote. Pearl wants more than anything for the old woman to quit campaigning in the café; Josie wants Pearl to think for herself and to put to rest the sappy legend of Silverheels. So they strike up a bet to prove, once and for all, if Silverheels was really the saint the legend portrays or if she connived the sick miners out of their gold. Amid the backdrop of World War I Liberty Bond drives, anti-German sentiment, and Pearl's romantic entanglements with a local boy and a tourist from Denver, Josie and Pearl both discover new personal meaning from the legend.

Prereading Activity

Ask students to investigate the cultural climate of the country from the Gold Rush in the mid-1800s through the beginning of World War I. Students should investigate the modes of transportation available, issues during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, and the suffrage movement. Students can share what they discover in small groups.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (L.4–7.1, 3) (SL.4–7.1)

1. On page 1, the author states, “even though the whole world is changing around you, everything can feel so much the same.” How is this true for Pearl? How are the Schmidts and Mr. Orenbach affected by the change in the world?
2. Pearl's mother continually says, “Neighbors do for neighbors.” How is this sentiment portrayed by the characters in the book? Which neighbors do not live by this rule?
3. Even though Josie is mean and rude to Pearl, Pearl's mother expects her to treat Josie with respect. How does Pearl respond to her mother's expectation?
4. Why do Josie and Pearl make the bet to prove the Legend of Silverheels? What does Josie want to prove to Pearl? How does Pearl try to prove her point?
5. Why does Mrs. Crawford insinuate that it is un-American to buy sausages from the Schmidts' meat market?

6. Why does George Crawford warn Pearl to stay away from Josie? What is Pearl's reaction to George's warning?
7. Why were Frank and Pearl surprised to find the cross on Buck Wilson's grave freshly marked and his grave well-tended? What conclusion do they make as a result?
8. Ms. Nelson tells Frank and Pearl that the veiled lady is alive and probably living in the area. What is their reaction to the news?
9. Why couldn't Pearl go camping to Buckskin Joe with Willie and Frank? What does Pearl think about not being able to go?
10. How do the old-timers in the town help Pearl discover the truth about Silverheels?
11. Why doesn't Mrs. Crawford want any donations from the Schmidts for the July Fourth picnic? How does Pearl's mother react to Mrs. Crawford's rudeness?
12. Why do the ladies in the town allow Mrs. Crawford to tell them what to do for the picnic and to control their donations for the Liberty Bonds?
13. Why does Pearl's mother feed the soldiers when they get off the train?
14. Why doesn't Pearl want to associate with the Schmidts and Mr. Orenbacher? Why is Pearl afraid to be seen with Josie?
15. Why does Pearl's attitude toward Josie begin to change? How does Pearl's change of heart affect her relationship with Josie?
16. What tactics does Josie use to help challenge Pearl's romantic ideas about the beautiful dancer Silverheels?
17. Why does Annie commit to stay with Robert after he gets drunk and violent?
18. Why does George accuse Josie of being a seditionist? What is Josie's reaction to George's accusation?
19. How does the possibility of Willie being drafted and going to war change Pearl's attitude?
20. How do Pearl and Imogene feel about manning the kissing booth at the July Fourth picnic?
21. Pearl enjoys Frank's company, but she has romantic feelings toward George. When do her feelings change? What prompts the change?
22. Why are Josie and her family the only people in town who are not afraid of the Crawfords' threats and bullying tactics?

23. Why does Josie refuse to contribute to the Liberty Bond drive? Are her reasons valid? Why or why not?
24. Why does Josie go to Denver? Why is she arrested and put in jail? How does Russell manage to convince the judge to release Josie?
25. How does Mrs. Carlisle in Denver help clear up the mystery surrounding Silverheels? What role does Josie play in the mystery?
26. Why is Josie so bitter about her past? Why does she finally release her anger and move forward with Russell?
27. What do investigators discover about the Crawfords involvement in the Liberty Bond drive? What is ironic about the Crawfords' illegal actions surrounding the Liberty Bond drive?

Writing and Research Activities

These activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.4–7.1, 2, 3) (RL.4–7.3, 7) (L.4–7.1, 2)

Dig into a Legend

Pearl and Frank spend a lot of time trying to discover the truth behind the Legend of Silverheels, and their discovery leads them on some exciting adventures. In small groups, ask students to search the Internet for a legend in the United States and to discover the kernel of truth behind the legend. Students should uncover the origin of the legend and investigate the background of the person or persons the legend is about. Then have students write a biography of the person or persons detailing the truth of their stories. Students should also include a preface that describes the legendary aspects of the person(s). Collect the biographies into a class book of legends and title it “Truth behind the Legends.”

Character Analysis

Ask students to select one of the major characters and to analyze the character and the role they play in the story. Students should draw on specific details in the text for support of their analysis. Then have students write a character poem that incorporates both the predominant trait(s) of the character and the role the character plays in the story. Students may use any poetic form to portray the character (narrative poetry, lyric poetry, free verse, song, rap, poem for more than one voice, or others). Have students practice and share their character poetry with the class.

Reflections on Lessons Learned

Ask students to write an extended journal entry from either Josie's or Pearl's point-of-view, reflecting on what they learn as a result of all that occurs during their bet. Students should make sure to include how their relationships and attitudes change toward other characters based on what they learn. Have students practice and present their extended journal entries to the class. Students may optionally include elements of costume and/or props.

Further Information

Visit the author's website, <http://www.jeanniemobley.com/>, in order to find more information about the author and to find links to resources on World War I and the suffrage movement.

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