



Teacher's Guide for *Highland Fling*

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Synopsis

Fifteen year old Tanya, reeling from her parents' divorce, is far from ready to embrace her Scottish heritage at North Carolina's Cross Creek Highland Games. She should be back in Green Bay, Wisconsin, doing what she was born to do: make documentaries. So Tanya decides to film a documentary that will expose the Highland Games as a nostalgic fabrication of what people want Highland heritage to be. During the course of an eventful weekend, Tanya learns that to go forward means turning to confront the past--her own past and that of her Scots forebears.

Activity Suggestions

Note: North Carolina (NC) Content Standards refer to 8th grade competency goals; Wisconsin (WI) Model Academic Standards refer to 8th grade performance standards; International Reading Association/ National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE) Standards refer to the general standards for English Language Arts; National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Curriculum Standards refer to middle grades.

1. In *Highland Fling*, one of Tanya's complaints is that many of the aspects of Scottish heritage she observes being celebrated are based more on myth and nostalgia than historic fact. Lead a discussion: What do students think is more important—people gathering to celebrate their cultural heritage however they choose, or people working hard to ensure that their traditions are based on historical fact?

What ethnic groups are prominent in your area? Guide students through an exploration of local cultural celebrations, and ask them to trace the origins of various traditions. How have they evolved over time?

- NC Goals for Language Arts: 1.03, 2.02, 3.01, 3.03
- NC Goals for Social Studies: 8.04
- WI Standards for Language Arts: A.8.3, C.8.1, C.8.3
- WI Standard for Social Studies: , E.8.3, E.8.4, E.8.6, E.8.9, E.8.14
- IRA/NCTE Standard for English Language Arts: 1, 7, 8, 9
- NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 1a, 1b 1c, 1d, 1e, 2f, 3h, 4e, 5b, 5d, 9a

2. In “Ballad of Glen Coe” (pp. 165 – 166), composer Jim McLean wrote lyrics about an historical event. Conduct an online search to find the full lyrics, or ask students to find other lyrics or poetry based on historic events. Ask students to write song lyrics or a poem about their ancestors, the idea of genetic memory, or an historical event that interests them.
 - NC Goal for Language Arts: 6.01
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: B.8.1
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 4, 5, 6
3. Review the passages on pp. 10-11 (Tanya humiliated on stage) and pp. 19-20 (Tanya reflecting on her love of videography). Ask students to compare and contrast the writing style in each. What choices did the author make in each to help convey Tanya’s feelings? What can readers learn about Tanya in each passage? (In the first example, responses might include the recitation of bare facts, the repetition of the phrase “I hated” for emphasis, strong word choices such as “blaring, unendurable, wicked,” descriptions of sensations such as “sweat dribbling” and “icy shivers.” In the second example, responses might include the use of specific examples such as “getting decent backlight on a cloudy day” and “interview a soft-spoken child” to make Tanya’s experience clear, the inclusion of both technical skills and emotional involvement to illustrate her complex attachment to this process, and the demonstration of her willingness to do grunt work in order to have total control of her projects.)

Follow by asking students to write a paragraph describing an activity or experience they dislike, and another paragraph describing an activity or experience they love. What choices can they make to help convey their emotions to readers?

- NC Goals for Language Arts: 1.01, 1.02, 1.04, 5.01, 6.01
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.8.1, A.8.2, A.8.3, B.8.1, B.8.2, B.8.3, E.8.1
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
4. Ask students to reflect on the importance of place/setting in *Highland Fling*. Lead a discussion: How did Tanya feel about her old home in Green Bay, Wisconsin and her new home near Laurinburg, North Carolina? Why did she have those feelings? Follow by asking students to write a paragraph or poem about two different places, each revealing their own feelings about that place.
 - NC Goals for English Language Arts: 1.01, 1.02, 4.01, 5.01, 5.02, 6.01
 - WI Standards for English Language Arts: A.8.2, B.8.1, B.8.2, B.8.3, C.8.3
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6
 - NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 4b
 5. Cultural identity is an important theme in *Highland Fling*. How did different characters choose to connect with their Scottish heritage? (Responses might include: Miguel chooses to embrace his Scottish heritage even though it is a small part of his genetic makeup; Mom chooses to embrace her Scottish heritage after a personal crisis; for most of the book, Tanya chooses not to identify with her Scottish heritage because it feels forced, unlike her feelings about growing up with Polish-American grandparents.)

Guide a discussion about cultural identity and personal choice. How many students take part in ethnic dancing, sometimes eat ethnic food, or participate in other aspects of cultural celebration? Do some students enjoy certain foods or activities that do not originate from a group they personally identify with? You may wish to remind students that “culture” refers to more than race or ethnicity, and that everyone is part of many cultural groups. When it comes to personal choices about cultural identity, there are no right or wrong answers.

- NC Goals for English Language Arts: 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 5.01
- WI Standards for English Language Arts: A.8.2, A.8.3, C.8.3
- WI Standards for Social Studies: E.8.2, E.8.3, E.8.5
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 3
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1a, 1d, 1e, 4c, 4e, 4f

6. Throughout much of the novel, Tanya struggles to reconcile her experiences with the concept of genetic memory, or ancestral memory. Guide a discussion: Do students think her reactions to people and events were the result of genetic memory, jealousy, or something else? A mix of both? You may wish to involve the student’s science teacher in the discussion.

- NC Goals for English Language Arts: 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 4.01
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 3, 12

7. (North Carolina) Because many of the early Scottish immigrants to arrive in North Carolina were illiterate, historians struggle to gain insights into their lives. Ask students to brainstorm methods historians might use to learn about people who left no letters, diaries, or journals, such as the women Tanya was trying to learn about. (Responses might include archaeological evidence, architectural remains, artifacts, or artwork.)

You may wish to build on this activity, and connect with Social Studies curriculum, by asking students to develop their own project about the history of Scottish settlement in North Carolina, past to present. What can students discover about Scottish immigrants throughout the state’s history? What do historians know for sure; what is conjecture; what is pure celebration? How do their personal experiences and opinions compare to Tanya’s as she tried to determine fact from legend? Allow students to develop presentations to share their findings.

- NC Goals for English Language Arts: 1.04, 2.01, 2.02
- NC Goals for Social Studies: 1.07, 8.01
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 7, 8, 12
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1b, 2c, 3h,

For Further Exploration

'We're Indians Sure Enough': The Legacy of Scottish Highlanders in the United States, by Michael Newton (2001)

Songs of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States, (CD), by Michael Newton (2001)

For more information on these and other resources, including online articles and other materials for teachers, see www.Saorsamedia.com

Damn' Rebel Bitches: The Women of the '45, by Maggie Craig (Mainstream Publishing: Edinburgh and London, 1997)

"Ballad of Glen Coe," by Jim McLean (London: Duart Music, 1963)

Author Presentations

Kathleen Ernst offers a variety of programs and presentations for student audiences. Information can be found on her website, www.kathleernerst.com.