



Teacher's Guide for *Secrets in the Hills: A Josefina Mystery*

By Kathleen Ernst

(American Girl, 2005)
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Synopsis

Josefina has heard tales and legends all her life: rumors of gold and silver buried in the hills, stories of a ghostly Weeping Woman who haunts the countryside. But she never imagined that such tales might be true...until the day a mysterious stranger arrives at her rancho. This suspenseful tale is set in New Mexico in 1826.

Activity Suggestions

Note: New Mexico (NM) Content Standards refer to 4th grade benchmarks; Wisconsin (WI) Model Academic Standards refer to 4th grade curriculum; 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 primary grades.

1. Mothers in Josefina's day used the Legend of the Weeping Woman as a tool to help young children remember to be home by dark. Ask students to explore other legends relevant to their family history or local community, or legends and folktales from other countries. What lessons might they teach? How are they similar to, and different from, the Legend of the Weeping Woman?
 - NM Standard for English Language Arts: 1.A.2
 - NM Standard for Social Studies: E.4.11
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.1, A.4.2, A.4.3, A.4.4
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: B.4.3
 - IRA/NCTE Standard for English Language Arts: 1, 2
 - NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 1c
2. During Josefina's time, relations between the Spanish settlers and local Pueblo Indian groups were generally friendly. But as explained in *Secrets in the Hills* and other Josefina books, both Spanish and various Native American nations sometimes took captives during raids. Some of these captives were well treated, and even adopted into their new families. Others were held as servants. A few managed to escape, or were traded back.

Ask students to imagine that they are Soledad, who escaped from captivity, or Teresita, who settled into life in a new culture. Have them write a poem about their feelings.

- NM Content Standards for Language Arts: 2.C.1, 3.B.4, 3.B.5
- NM Content Standard for Social Studies: 1.A.1
- WI Standards for Language Arts: b.4.1, b.4.2
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 4, 5
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1.b, 4.g, 5d, 9b

3. Written records from girls Josefina's age who lived in New Mexico in the 1820s are rare. Ask students to brainstorm different methods historians and authors might use to learn about this time and place.

While working on *Secrets in the Hills*, Kathleen Ernst used books, websites, visits to historic sites and museums, and old artwork and maps to learn more about Josefina's world. Guide students through an exploration of online resources that can help develop their own understanding of this period. (See "For Further Exploration" below for websites to visit.) For example, each student might choose one or more photographs from the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives site to study. What can they learn about the past from studying this photograph? What questions do students have after examining the photograph?

- NM Standard for Language Arts: 1.B.2
- NM Standard for Social Studies: 1.D.1
- WI Standards for English Language Arts: E.4.1, E.4.2,
- WI Standard for Social Studies: b.4.1
- IRA/NCTE Standard for English Language Arts: 7
- NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 2d

4. Josefina's *rancho* was situated near Santa Fe. Ask students to locate Santa Fe on a map, and then map the routes that people and goods took to and from Josefina's community. They include:

- Priests had left NM and returned to Spain when Mexico won independence.
- Teresita had been born on Navaho land; Soledad was taken there as a captive, then she traveled back to Santa Fe.
- Tía Delores ordered cocoa beans from Mexico City; Señor Zamora also traveled from Mexico City. (The trail between Santa Fe and Mexico City was called El Camino Real.)
- Roger Rexford traveled from St. Louis, Missouri; wagon trains brought other goods from the United States. (The trail between Santa Fe and Missouri was called the Santa Fe Trail.)

What impact did trade routes between Mexico, New Mexico, and the United States have on Native peoples; Spanish settlers?

- NM Standards for Social Studies: 1.A.1, 1.B.1, 2.C.1, 2.E.2, 2.F.1, 4.B.1, 4.C.2
- WI Standards for Social Studies: A.4.2, A.4.5, A.4.8, B.4.9, D.4.7
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 3b, 3h

5. Review the important role the landscape played in *Secrets in the Hills*. Señor Zamora was searching for certain landscape features; Josefina, her father, and Señor Zamora all enjoyed walking out in the hills near the rancho; Roger Rexford dreamed of going home to Missouri, Doña Felicitas enjoyed remembering the walks she'd taken in the hills when younger. The landscape also dictated what kind of homes people built (adobe), what dye plants were available to weavers, and what kind of medicinal plants were available for *curanderas*.

You may wish to review passages that reflect characters' feelings for place (pp. 63-64, p. 95, p. 110, p. 122). Then ask students to consider how their local landscape affects their lives. How do they interact with the natural environment; the human-built environment? How has the interaction changed from Josefina's time to the present? Ask students to draw their favorite place, and write an essay or poem describing how they feel when they are there.

- NM Standards for Language Arts: 1.A.2, 2.C.1, 3.B.4
 - NM Standards for Social Studies: 2.B.3, 2.C.2
 - WI Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1, B.4.2
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: A.4.4, B.4.4
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 4, 5
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1d, 2e, 3g, 3h, 4b
6. Josefina felt a great deal of responsibility for her family, friends, and neighbors, especially while her Tía Magdalena was away. Ask students to write an essay or letter explaining how their lives are similar to, or different from, Josefina's. In what ways do they feel responsibility toward others?
 - NM Standards for Language Arts: 1.C.1, 2.B.8, 2.C.1, 3.A.1, 3.A.2, 3.B.4, 3.B.5
 - NM Standard for Social Studies: 1.B.1
 - WI Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1, B.4.2
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: C.4.1
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 5, 6
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 4c, 4e, 5a
 7. Have students work in small groups to create a graphic organizer comparing their lives to Josefina's. What aspects are similar; what are aspects are different? Suggest topics including size, celebrations, where the families live, how parents or guardians earn a living, where and how students learn.
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: E.4.3, E.4.8
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 4c, 4e, 5a
 8. Compare the celebrations, food, craftwork, and other cultural expressions found in *Secrets in the Hills* with other ethnic and cultural expressions common among your students, community, or region. If possible, invite a guest into the classroom to share some of their ethnic traditions. How have these traditions changed over time?
 - NM Standards for Social Studies: 2.E.1, 3.B.1
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: E.4.4, E.4.8
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1a, 9a

For Further Exploration

A factual and colorful exploration of many of these themes can be found in *Welcome to Josefina's World, 1824: Growing up on America's Southwest Frontier*, by Yvette La Pierre (Pleasant Company Publications: Middleton, WI, 1999).

El Rancho de Las Golondrinas

334 Los Pinos Road

Santa Fe, NM 87507

Phone (515) 471-2261

Website: <http://www.golondrinas.org/>

This historic site was used, in part, as a model for Josefina's rancho. Visitors to the website can see photographs of many of the buildings and rooms.

El Camino Real International Heritage Center

Phone (505) 854-3600

Website:

http://www.caminorealheritage.org/view/index.php?XID=_home&language=english

Follow the "Teachers" link to a variety of relevant lesson plans and resources.

This facility is a joint project of New Mexico State Monuments and the United States Bureau of Land Management with support from the El Camino Real International Heritage Center Foundation. The Center presents a 400-year history of trade and cultural exchange between Mexico, America, Spain, Europe, and Asia.

Palace of the Governors Photo Archives

Website: http://econtent.unm.edu/in_dexpg.php

Students can browse through the digital archives, or search topics, including Children, Events, Indigenous Peoples, Historic Buildings.

Author Presentations

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