



Teacher's Guide for *The Runaway Friend: A Kirsten Mystery*

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Synopsis

In 1854, Kirsten has been living on the Minnesota frontier for only a few weeks when her neighbor and friend, Erik Sandahl, disappears. Erik had promised to help the Larsons at harvest time, and he owes Uncle Olav money. Has he run out on his promises? Everyone seems to think so—except Kirsten. Can she figure out what's happened to her friend?

Activity Suggestions

Note: Minnesota (MN) Academic Standards and Wisconsin (WI) Model Academic Standards refer to 4th grade curriculum; National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Curriculum Standards refer to early grades; International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE) Standards refer to the general standards for English Language Arts.

1. Kirsten had to get used to many things about her new home; one of them was the landscape itself. Ask students to identify places in the text where the landscape (and the animals that lived within it) helped shape the story, and to create a work of visual art or a poem that expresses the scene's emotions.
 - MN Standards for Language Arts: I.C, I.D, II.A
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, B.4.1
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: A.4.4
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 1, 2, 5
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 3.h, 4.b
2. Guide students through an exploration of the author's website, www.kathleenernst.com, focusing on the "Story Behind the Story" and "Research" pages in the section devoted to *The Runaway Friend*. Remind students that authors and historians can use many different methods to learn about the past. How many examples of different research methodology can students find illustrated on the website? Some examples are listed below.
 1. Visual Images (photographs, postcards, paintings)

2. Objects (artifacts, reproductions)
 3. Primary Written Sources (reminiscences, letters)
 4. Landscape (natural and human-made)
 5. People (historians, descendants, museum curators)
 6. Places/Museums (traditional museums, historic sites)
 7. Folklore (stories, music, folktales, anything else passed from person to person)
 8. Reference Materials (books, microfilm, information on websites)
 9. Experiential (knitting old patterns, cooking food using old methods)
 - MN Standards for Language Arts: II.D
 - MN Standards for Social Studies: IV.B, IV.C
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: E.4.1, F.4.1
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: B.4.1
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 7, 8
 - NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 2.d
3. Ask students to choose one of the excerpts on the Research page of the author's website (in the section devoted to *The Runaway Friend*). How did that passage help the author construct the plot? Ask students to write a letter or diary entry from the point-of-view of the person who experienced something similar to what is described.
- MN Standards for Language Arts: I.C, II.A
 - MN Standards for Social Studies: IV.B, IV.C
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, B.4.1, E.4.1
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: B.4.1
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 5
 - NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 2.d
4. Ask students how many examples of neighbors helping neighbors they can recall from *The Runaway Friend*. Lead a discussion: How important was it, in 1855, for people to cooperate? Do the students think it is as important today? Why or why not?
- MN Standard for Language Arts: I.C
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: B.4.9, E.4.15
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 4, 11
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 5.g, 6.f, 9.b
5. When Erik disappeared, Kirsten struggled between her feelings of responsibility to her family and the same feelings she felt toward her friend. Guide a discussion about loyalty: What do students think is the right path when a person feels conflicted loyalties? Is compromise possible? Do students think Kirsten did the right thing when she decided to try and find Erik, even if it meant disobeying her father or disappointing her mother?
- MN Standard for Language Arts: III.A
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.1, C.4.3

- WI Standards for Social Studies: C.4.1, E.4.2
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 4, 11
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 4.e, 4.g
6. Kirsten and her family were newly arrived from Sweden. Ask students to recall elements of their ethnic heritage that appeared in *The Runaway Friend*. Lead a discussion: How did their cultural identify influence their daily lives?
- MN Standard for Language Arts: I.C
 - MN Standard for Social Studies: II.C
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: C.4.1, C.4.3, E.4.4
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 4, 11
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1.a, 1.b, 1.c, 1.d
7. In *The Runaway Friend*, Kirsten was struggling with two problems: Erik's disappearance, and her feelings of homesickness. Ask students to recall the climax scene, when Kirsten confronts the wolf chasing the wagon. How did Kirsten grow and change because of that experience? What did she learn about herself?
- MN Standard for Language Arts: I.C
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.1, C.4.3
 - WI Standard for Social Studies: E.4.7
 - IRA/NCTE Standard for English Language Arts: 3
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 4.a, 4.b, 4.e, 4.f, 4.g
8. What ethnic groups have moved into your state or area? Why did they come? Provide students with immigrant accounts, and ask them to use a graphic organizer (perhaps a Venn Diagram) to compare and contrast them with Kirsten's experiences.
- MN Standards for Language Arts: I.C, I.D
 - MN Standards for Social Studies: II.A, II.C, IV.A, V.A, V.D
 - WI Standard for Language Arts: A.4.3
 - WI Standards for Social Studies: A.4.7, B.4.10, E.4.7, E.4.13
 - IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1.a, 1.b, 1.d, 2.a, 2.c
9. If you have children in your class who have immigrated from another country, ask if they would feel comfortable sharing some of their experiences with their classmates. Or, invite a recent immigrant to visit your class to discuss his or her experiences. Or, provide students with an account written by a recent immigrant. How do his or her experiences compare and contrast with Kirsten's?
- MN Standard for Language Arts: III.A
 - MN Standard for Social Studies: II.G
 - WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.3, C.4.3

- WI Standards for Social Studies: A.4.7, B.4.4, B.4.8, E.4.7, E.4.9, E.4.13
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 11
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1.a, 1.b, 1.d, 1.a

10. Ask students to identify something from *The Runaway Friend* that sparked their interest to learn more. (For example, they may wish to discover more information about Swedish food, immigrant children's lives in the 19th century, or the status of wolves in Minnesota today.) Follow by having the students conduct research, and then present their findings to the class, using whatever methods or tools they think most effective.

- MN Standards for Language Arts: I.C, II.D
- MN Standards for Social Studies: IV.B, IV.C
- WI Standards for Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.1, F.4.1
- WI Standard for Social Studies: B.4.1
- IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts: 3, 7, 8
- NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 2.d