



Teacher's Guide for *Trouble at Fort La Pointe*

Edgar Allan Poe Award Finalist
for Best Children's Mystery,
Mystery Writers of America

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Synopsis

Suzette Choudoir has spent each of her twelve summers at La Pointe Island on Lake Superior, where Ojibwe people camp by the French fur-trade fort. It is 1732 and if her papa wins the trappers' competition, the prize will let him stay with his Ojibwe family year-round instead of wintering in far-off Montréal with the other French voyageurs. But a troublemaker sabotages the competition--and Papa! Only someone who's both Ojibwe and French can figure out what's going on...someone like Suzette. (Age 9 & up)

Activity Suggestions

1. Have students create a graphic organizer identifying Suzette's personality traits. (For example, "Suzette" can be the hub of a wheel, with a different trait identified on each spoke.) Which traits helped Suzette solve the mystery? Which caused problems for her? Are any traits on both lists?

□ [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2](#)

2. Ask students to create cinquains about Suzette's world. (A cinquain is a verse of five lines following the pattern of 1-2-3-4-1 words in each line.) You can guide students through this activity by providing the following structure: Line 1, noun; Line 2, 2 adjectives; Line 3, 3 verbs; Line 4, 4-word phrase; Line 5, noun. For example:

Lake
Restless, powerful
Sleeping, singing, dancing
New moods each day
Home

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1](#)

3. Have student use a graphic organizer to list problems Suzette confronted in this story, and the actions she took to solve them. Which clues to the mystery was Suzette able to identify or follow because of her Ojibwe heritage? Which was she able to follow because of her French heritage?

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3](#)

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: E.4.2](#)

4. Ask students to study the media for examples of Native American people in the news today. What stories are reported? What issues do students find? Reinforce the idea that while Ojibwe and other American Indian people may actively perpetuate certain customs and traditions, they live modern lives just like other people.

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: F.4.1](#)

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.10](#)

5. The fur trade era brought very different cultural groups into contact with each other. Lead a discussion about the changes this brought to all parties, including social changes as well as economic ones. What advantages and disadvantages can students identify for Ojibwe people and French traders and voyageurs who participated in fur trade cycle? What examples of conflict and cooperation can students identify from the novel? Ask students to create artwork depicting a relevant scene.

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.3](#)

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.10, D.4.3, E.4.15](#)

6. Ask students to map the journey of a beaver pelt from the time the animal was trapped until the time a beaverskin hat was shipped across the Atlantic to market.

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: A.4.7, B.4.7, B.4.9, D.4.3](#)

7. Read aloud the descriptions of Suzette's lodges (p. 11, p. 24). Divide students into small groups, and ask them to research the homes built by Native American tribes and bands in different parts of North America during the 1700s, then present their findings to the class. What does each type of home reveal about the local environment? (You may wish to remind students that these are historical dwellings, and that modern Indian people live in the same types of homes other people do.)

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: C.4.1, F.4.1](#)

[□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: A.4.4](#)

8. Lead a discussion about research methods an historian or historical novelist can employ when studying the fur trade era, stressing the importance of considering both French-Canadian perspectives, which have been transmitted primarily through written sources, and Ojibwe perspectives, which have been transmitted primarily through oral history. What other sources of information are available? (responses might include artifacts, studying the landscape, archeological information, period artwork)

□ Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.4.7, B.4.10, E.4.11

For Further Exploration

Forts Folle Avoine Historical Park
Burnett County, Wisconsin.
Phone: 715-866-8890.
<http://theforts.org/>

Folle Avoine Historical Park brings to life the rich heritage of the fur trade area in the Folle Avoine ("Wild Rice") region of northwestern Wisconsin. Costumed interpreters interact with modern-day visitors in an Ojibwe village and four traders' cabins, historic reconstruction's of 1802-1804 winter of the North West and XY Fur Trade Companies. Folle Avoine is a National Register of Historic Places site.

Madeline Island Museum
La Pointe, WI
Phone: 715-747-2415.
<http://madelineislandmuseum.wisconsinhistory.org/>

This historic site, operated by the Wisconsin Historical Society, is located in La Pointe. A variety of artifacts from the fur trade era are on display.

Waswagoning
Lac du Flambeau, WI
Phone: 715-588-2241.
<http://www.waswagoning.us/>

Waswagoning is a recreated Ojibwe village in Lac du Flambeau, welcoming day visitors and school groups. A visit provides wonderful insight into traditional Ojibwe culture.

White Oak Society
Deer River, MN
Phone: 218-246-9393.
<http://www.whiteoak.org/>

The White Oak Society is a living history organization interpreting the Great Lakes region fur trade era. Members provide programs at the White Oak Learning Centre & White Oak Fur Post near Deer River, Minnesota. Their website is a particularly rich resource for online learning.

Author Presentations

Kathleen A. Ernst offers a number of programs and presentations for student audiences. Information about her current offerings can be found on her website.

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