

Kathleen Ernst
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST

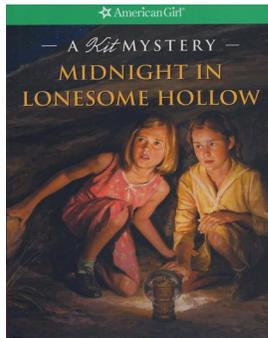


Teacher's Guide For *Midnight In Lonesome Hollow*

A Kit Kittredge American Girl Mystery

Written by Kathleen Ernst

Published by American Girl Books 2007



Kit is visiting Aunt Millie in 1934. When a professor arrives to study Kentucky mountain traditions, Kit is thrilled to help her with her research—until it becomes clear that somebody doesn't want "outsiders" nosing around. Kit decides to find out who's making trouble...even if it means venturing into Lonesome Hollow in the dark of night.

Girls will enjoy solving the mystery right along with Kit. This book includes an illustrated "Looking Back" section to provide historical context.

Activity Suggestions

1. Ask students to list examples of some of the ways that characters in the novel "made do" when confronted with scarcity. (Examples include growing food instead of buying it at a store, making baskets, gathering wild food, "holing up" food rather than buying canning jars, using discarded glass bottles as artwork, and using newspaper for insulation and art on cabin walls.)
2. Professor Lucy Vanderpool was interested in basketry because, as people began using pails and paper bags to carry things in, she thought it might be a "dying art." What examples can students find in their community of skills that are being replaced or made obsolete by technology? How have those changes affected the people who made, owned, or used the items or skills?
3. Professor Vanderpool was a folklorist. As she explains on pp. 21-22, *folk* means people and *lore* has to do with all the knowledge and traditions people pass down to others. Guide students through a folklore project of their own by asking them to interview an adult about a topic or activity that interests them. What do they learn? What are the best ways to document what they learn? Ask students to present their project to the class.



4. When students have completed the book, ask them to recall several examples of times when a character confronted difficult personal choices because of the Great Depression. (Examples include Harlan deciding to quit his job in the mine and undertaking the riskier enterprise of harvesting wild ginseng, men moving away from their family in order to find work, Roy's father pretending to be dirty and hungry so he could get a job he desperately needed.) What would students have done in these circumstances?

5. Ask students to look in the novel for examples of ways in which the Great Depression influenced rural Kentucky citizens' independence and interdependence with other communities, states, the nation, and the world. (Examples include coal miners digging coal that provided electricity in distant states, Harlan digging ginseng for the Asian market, Fern recording music that would be played in other regions and states, Mrs. Skidmore producing baskets.) How do these examples compare with examples from the students' community?

6. Lead a discussion: How did geographic features affect life in the fictional community of Mountain Hollow? What challenges and advantages did it present? How did 1930s life in the mountains compare with life in other parts of Kentucky, the region, the nation?

7. Provide lyrics of local folk songs for your students to analyze. What do the lyrics say about the history and culture of their community, region, or state?

8. Some of the local people in this book welcomed visitors; some did not. Lead a discussion: Were Mrs. Skidmore, Roy, and Harlan justified in their dislike of outsiders? Were Kit and Professor Vanderpool acting appropriately when they collected and documented some of the folklore they encountered in the mountain community? If someone with good intentions creates conflict, how can that conflict be addressed and resolved?

9. After students have read the novel, return to the scene on pp. 122-125, when Harlan is questioning Fern and Kit. Discuss the conversation with students. Why was Harlan angry with the girls for following him? Why does he accuse Kit of causing trouble? Kit and Harlan have different opinions about Kit's actions—do students think both are justified? Which comments made in the argument are facts; which are opinions? Can students recall from their reading how the conflict between Kit and Harlan is resolved?



10. Ask students to visit www.kathleernerst.com/book_midnight_lonesome.php and read the “The Story Behind the Story” blog entry. Ask them to analyze the steps the author took to research the book, and to list examples of primary and secondary sources used. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using each type of source when conducting research?

11. Ask students to visit www.kathleernerst.com/book_midnight_lonesome.php and read “The Story Behind the Story” blog entry. Ask each student to choose one of the historical photographs, and then to imagine that they are one of the people pictured in their photograph. Guide them through an imaginative writing exercise from the point-of-view of that individual. For example, they might write a diary entry or letter; they might write a descriptive poem about that moment in time, using strong sensory details; they might imagine a conflict they are having with another person in the photograph (or just offstage), and write a section of dialogue or even a short story about that.

12. Guide students through a project researching the Great Depression’s impact on their own family or community. Ask students to brainstorm different types of research they can use to learn more about this topic. You may wish to have the students work in small groups to create focus questions, conduct research, and plan a presentation to the class.

For Further Exploration

A factual and colorful exploration of many of these themes can be found in Harriett Brown’s *Welcome to Kit’s World: Growing Up During America’s Great Depression* (Pleasant Company Publications: Middleton, WI, 2002).

The National Archives provides good information to help educators and students access online resources. <http://www.archives.gov/education/>

The Library of Congress also provides a wealth of information for teachers and students. Information, photographs, audio files, teaching plans, and more can be found in the Great Depression collection. <http://www.loc.gov>

Author Presentations

Author Kathleen Ernst offers a number of programs and presentations for students. Information can be found at <http://www.kathleernerst.com/programs.php>

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"Ernst does a fine job of showing not only the poverty of Appalachia during the Depression but also the ingenuity of its people."

— **American Library Association *Booklist***

"This nicely paced mystery integrates historical information from the period into the story line well. ...Older American Girl and mystery fans will enjoy learning more about (one of) their favorite characters."

— **School Library Journal**

Midnight In Lonesome Hollow is available as a softcover book from independent bookstores as well as from Amazon, Barnes & Nobles and other book vendors. Signed and personalized copies of the book can be acquired from the author, Kathleen Ernst. For more information, click on http://www.kathleernerst.com/book_midnight_lonesome.php