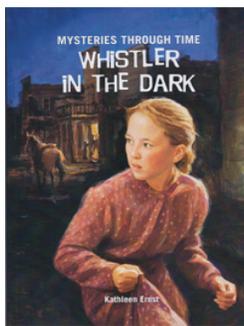


Kathleen Ernst
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST



Teacher's Guide For *Whistler In The Dark* An American Girl History Mystery

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It's 1867. Twelve-year-old Emma Henderson is mortified when Mother takes to wearing a Reform Dress—hideous bloomers! Worse, Mother has accepted a newspaper job in wild, far-off Colorado Territory. But even Emma can't imagine just how badly things will go in Twin Pines. From the moment she and Mother step off the stagecoach, it's clear someone doesn't want them there.

This book includes a detailed "Peak Into The Past" essay.

Activity Suggestions

1. In this book, a number of female characters help establish the community of Twin Pines, each in their own way. Lead a discussion in which students list professions and characteristics of Mother, Tildy Pearce, Amaretta Holly, and Mrs. Sloane. What characteristics do they share? In what ways are the women unique? Follow by asking students to conduct research about real women who were among the first non-native people to live in the American west. How do they compare to the characters in this story? Have each student identify one woman to study, and ask them to share what they learn in an oral presentation.
2. Emma and her mother were dependent upon their neighbors in the isolated community of Twin Pines. Ask students to identify examples of cooperation and interdependence found within the novel. Lead a discussion: Why was having a newspaper so important to the community? Do they think it is equally important today? Why or why not?
3. Ask students to write a first-person account of a girl who is wearing her Reform Dress in public for the first time. Or, they can write from the perspective of a bystander who sees a young woman walking in a Reform Dress. What do they think and feel? Why?



4. Ask students to debate the issue of dress reform. Divide into small groups, half pro and half con. Give students time to discuss the issue in small groups and prepare their arguments. Remind them to try to think from the perspective of people living in the 1860s, within the context of that time. Each group should select one or more speakers to present their arguments. After the debate, students can vote on the issue.

5. Allow each student to choose a relevant historical photograph for further study. Examples can be found in the online collection managed by the Denver Public Library. Ask students to imagine that they are an historical novelist as they consider the photograph. What can they learn from the photo? What questions does it raise? Ask students to write a paragraph from the point of view of one of the individuals in the photograph, or from a person who might enter that scene. What do they see, hear, smell? What are they doing? How do they feel?

6. Lead a discussion with students about current fashion trends that might cause dissent within families or communities. What parallels and differences do students see between dress reformers of the mid-1800s and modern fashion innovators? Or, ask students to work in small groups to research fashion trends from 1867 to the present, and create a pictorial timeline showing the changes. What factors do each new style have in common? How are they different?

Author Presentations

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

"Agatha Award Nominee for Best Children's/Young Adult Mystery"

— Malice Domestic

"WILLA Award Finalist for Best Children's/Young Adult Mystery"

— Women Writing The West

Whistler In The Dark is available in softcover as well as hardcover library binding from independent bookstores and also from Amazon, Barnes & Nobles, and other vendors. Personalized, softcover copies can be acquired directly from the author, Kathleen Ernst. For more details, click on http://www.kathleenernst.com/book_whistler_dark.php