



Teacher's Guide for *The Night Riders of Harpers Ferry*

By Kathleen A. Ernst
(White Mane Publishing, 1996)

Activity Suggestions

1. Have students create Venn Diagrams comparing Solomon and Mahalia. What characteristics and beliefs do the two share? How are they different? What admirable values do these characters exhibit?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2; A.8.2
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: E.4.2; E.8.2
2. Ask students to write a diary entry from the point-of-view of a member of the cavalry expedition that escaped from Harpers Ferry.
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1; B.8.1
3. Discuss Solomon's reactions to Mahalia's behavior in Chapters 1 and 2. What do they say about the manners and mores of the 1860s? How do they compare to the way students might react in similar situation today?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3; A.8.2, A.8.3
4. Discuss motivation with students. What motivated Solomon to join the cavalry? What motivated Corbin to join the Confederate partisan group? Was either motivated by patriotism? Ask students to brainstorm possible motivations for fighting in the Civil War. (Possible answers include patriotism, loyalty, search for adventure, need for financial security, desire to emancipate slaves, peer pressure, draft, family expectations, etc.) Which reasons do students feel are valid for fighting in a war? What motivations would compel students to fight in a war today? How do current events compare with the events that led to the American Civil War?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, C.4.3; A.8.2, C.8.3
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: C.4.1; B.8.3, C.8.1
5. Discuss loyalty with students. Why did Solomon choose Randolph to accompany him on the mission in Chapter 10, even though he was one of the worst riders in the company? How did issues of loyalty affect the cavalry officers and men in Chapter 12? Would the students have made the same decisions that Solomon and Colonel Davis made?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.5; B.8.6

6. Discuss the idea of partisans with students. Do they think it was fair or appropriate for some people fighting the Civil War to dress in plain clothes while others dressed in uniform? Compare the political situation of the 1860s with modern political conflicts. Are there causes today that justify such actions?
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.5; B.8.5](#)

7. Solomon's experience of war was very different than what he expected. Invite a veteran to visit the class and discuss his or her expectations and experiences, and compare those with Solomon's. Or, ask students to find narratives written by soldiers in a variety of different wars. What do the experiences have in common? What is different about each?
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.4.3, B.4.4; B.8.1, B.8.4](#)

8. Direct students to the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park's or C & O Canal National Historic Park's websites (see links below). Allow students to explore the photo archives, then select one historic photograph for further study. What can they learn from studying the photograph? What questions does it raise? Ask students to write a paragraph or essay 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?
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1, B.8.1](#)
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.8.1](#)

For Further Exploration

Harpers Ferry National Historic Park
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.
Phone: 304 535- 6298.
<http://www.nps.gov/hafe/home.htm>

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is located at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers in the states of West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland. Explore the terrain Solomon experienced in the story, and learn more about the town's history by visiting the many exhibits and restored buildings. The park's website contains a sampling of historic photographs.

Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park
Headquarters in Sharpsburg, Maryland.
Phone: 301-739-4200.
http://www.nps.gov/choh/co_visit.htm

The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park stretches from Washington, DC, to Cumberland Maryland. Easy day hikes in the Harpers Ferry/Sandy Hook area will help readers explore the landscape described in the novel. The park's website is

particularly strong in educational resources, and includes interviews with former boaters, historic photographs, and lesson plans.

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. Contacted Kathleen by phone (Central US time zone) or via email to discuss content, cost, and scheduling of programs.

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