



Teacher's Guide for *Whistler in the Dark*

By Kathleen A. Ernst
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Synopsis

It's 1867. Twelve-year-old Emma Henderson is mortified when her 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 horse-drawn stagecoach, it's clear that someone doesn't want them there. (Age 9 & up)

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.
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.1, C.4.3, F.4.1
 - WI Model Academic's Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.4.3, B.4.7, E.4.7
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 they think it is equally important today? Why or why not?
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.3
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.9, E.4.5, E.4.10, E.4.15
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?
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, B.4.1
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.

- WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.3, C.4.1, C.4.3

5. Guide students to the photographs section of the Golden Pioneer Museum website (see link below). Allow each student to choose one photograph for further study, such as Early Washington Avenue, Muletrain, The Transcript, or Early Miners. Or, allow them to choose an historical image from the online collection managed by the Denver Public Library (see link below). 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?

- WI Model Academic's Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1
- WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: B.4.1, E.4.1

6. Lead a discussion with students about current fashion trends which 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?

- WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: C.4.3, F.4.1
- WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.2, B.4.4

For Further Exploration

Clear Creek History Park
Golden, Colorado

Phone: 303-278-3557.

<http://clearcreekhistorypark.org/>

This outdoor museum uses costumed guides and exhibits to interpret the Golden region from 1843-1900. Teacher materials are available in PDF format on their website.

Golden Pioneer Museum
Golden, Colorado

Phone: 303-278-7151.

<http://www.goldenpioneermuseum.com/>

Exploring the history of Golden, Colorado, will provide insight into the era depicted in "Whistler in the Dark." Highlights of the museum website include children's activities and historical photographs.

The Photography Collection: Western History/Genealogy Department
Denver Public Library
Denver, Colorado.
<http://gowest.coalliance.org/>

This site contains a searchable and growing collection of images from the library's collection.

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. Kathleen can be contacted by phone (Central US time zone) or via email to discuss content, cost, and scheduling arrangements.

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