

GHOST HAWK

BY SUSAN COOPER

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Synopsis

Ghost Hawk follows the lives of two boys, Little Hawk and John Wakeley, and their journey to manhood in seventeenth century New England. At eleven, Little Hawk is sent into the woods during winter with a tomahawk, his bow and arrows, a steel knife (received by his father in an exchange with the white settlers), and his wits. If Little Hawk can survive for three months after being left alone and blindfolded, he will be a man.

Little Hawk's adventures are thrilling and frightening, but Little Hawk survives, besting a wolf and the bitter cold of winter. He looks forward to his homecoming and his reunion with his family; however, during his absence, the village has been destroyed by disease. Never did Little Hawk imagine that the dangers he faced during his three-moon ordeal would be less frightening than the changes wrought on his family and his village by the white settlers. He must face a shockingly different future.

John Wakeley is ten when his father dies, and he is apprenticed shortly afterward to a cooper. During his seven-year apprenticeship, he comes to realize that he views Native Americans differently than his fellow Englishmen. Encounters with Little Hawk and Roger Williams shape his perception of Native Americans and prevent him from viewing them with suspicion, prejudice, or disdain for his entire life.

Ghost Hawk is told from the cultural perspectives of these two richly drawn characters. Part adventure story and part spiritual journey, this is a story of kinship between two men from different cultures who seek to do what they believe to be right in difficult and uncertain times.

Hooks

- When does a boy become a man in today's society? How does age matter to growing up, and what other factors are important?
- Have you heard of anyone today who has survived alone in the wilderness? What were the details of the experience?

- Should land be owned or shared? What should happen when two people or two cultures want the same land?
- Can one culture be superior to another? If no, why do you think many people believed that for so long?
- What do you suppose happens when you die? Do you believe you can communicate with the people left behind or observe them in their daily activities?

About the Author

Growing up during WWII in England, **Susan Cooper** listened to her mother read stories by candlelight that wavered as bombs fell overhead. In an age before TV and with evening restrictions, she spent hours reading fairy tales and Dickens. Her childhood set the stage for the struggle that exists in many of her fantasy novels—the struggle between light and dark, good and evil. She and her brother both fell in love with words and stories and were the first writers in their family.

At the urging of her high school headmistress, Susan Cooper applied to Oxford University where she was finally accepted after her second application. She was at Oxford while J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were professors, and the focus of her literature classes was British writing before the 1830's. Upon graduation she pursued a career in journalism, working as a reporter and features writer for the London *Sunday Times*. Susan Cooper then moved to the U.S., settling in Massachusetts. Eventually she wrote for the theater and also spent time as a screenwriter. For many years of her writing career, the late—and legendary—Margaret K. McElderry was her editor.

Susan Cooper has written for adults and children, and her Dark is Rising Series is one of the most respected and beloved fantasies of all time, winning a Newbery Medal, a Newbery Honor, and two Carnegie Honors. In 2012, Susan Cooper was the recipient of the Margaret E. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement from the ALA. Today, she lives in Massachusetts on an almost island in a salt marsh that is accessible to the mainland only when the tide is out.

Related Links

Susan Cooper's official website, www.thelostland.com

Conversation between Susan Cooper and Jim Dale about the audio version of the book, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV0B2lbrl6A>

Connections

Native American Life

- Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Little, Brown, and Co. 2007.
- Caduto, Michael J. and Bruchac, Joseph. *Keepers of the Earth: Native American Stories and Environmental Activities for Children*. Fulcrum, 1988.
- Charleyboy, Lisa and Leatherdale, Mary Beth, editors. *Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American Voices*. Annick Press, 2014.
- Erdrich, Louise. *The Birchbark House*. Disney-Hyperion, 2002. (First of four book series).
- Kroeber, Theodora. *Ishi, Last of His Tribe*. Parnassus Press, 1964.
- Mann, Charles, C. *Before Columbus: The Americas Of 1491*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2009.
- Reich, Susanna. *Painting the Wild Frontier: The Art and Adventures of George Catlin*. Clarion Books, 2008.
- Tunis, Edwin. *Indians*. Crowell, 1979.

Intersection Between Native American and European Cultures

- d'Aulaire, Ingri and Edgar Parin. *Pocahontas*. Doubleday, 1946.
- Freedman, Russell. *Indian Chiefs*. Holiday House, 1987.
- Fritz, Jean. *The Double Life of Pocahontas*. Putnam, 1983.
- Holm, Jennifer L. *Boston Jane: An Adventure*. HarperCollins, 2001.
- Mikaelsen, Ben. *Touching Spirit Bear*. HarperCollins, 2001.
- Paulsen, Gary. *Woods Runner*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2010.
- Ray, Deborah Kogan. *Paiute Princess: The Story of Sarah Winnemucca*. Frances Foster Books, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2012.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House on the Prairie*. Harper, 1953 (Second of nine book series).

Colonial Life

- Hermes, Patricia. *Dear America: The Starving Time*. Scholastic, 2001.
- Karwoski, Gail. *Surviving Jamestown: The Adventures of Young Sam Collier*. Peachtree, 2001.
- Lasky, Kathryn. *Dear America: A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple: Mayflower*. Scholastic, 1995.
- Lassieur, Allison. *Colonial America: An Interactive History Adventure*. Capstone Press, 2011.
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *The Mayflower and the Pilgrims' New World*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2008.
- Rinaldi, Ann. *Dear America: The Journal of Jasper Jonathan Pierce: A Pilgrim Boy*. Scholastic, 2000.
- Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Houghton Mifflin, 1958.
- Walker, Sally, M. *Written in Bone: Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland*. Carolrhoda Books, 2009.

Survival Stories

George, Jean Craighead. *Julie of the Wolves*. Harper and Row, 1972.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. Random House, 1996.

O'Dell, Scott. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Paulsen, Gary. *Hatchet*. Bradbury Press, 1987.

Other Young Adult Books by Susan Cooper

The Boggart. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1993.

The Boggart and the Monster. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 1997.

The Dark is Rising. Atheneum, 1973. (First of five book series).

Green Boy. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2002.

Dawn of Fear. HMH Books for Young Readers, 1970.

King of Shadows. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1999.

Seaward. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1983.

Victory. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2006.

Activities

IN THE LIBRARY

Becoming a Man

Ghost Hawk deals with the journey to manhood of Little Hawk and John Wakeley. Have students compare the two journeys—which was more difficult and why?

Novel Subsections

The novel is divided into four parts: Freezing Moon, Planting Moon, Burning Moon, and Ripening Moon. Have students find a quote from each section that best explains the title of each section.

Land Ownership

Have students look up the lyrics to Woodie Guthrie's famous song, "This Land is Your Land," penned in 1994. Why does Susan Cooper open the book with one verse of this song? What parts of the U.S. are still "owned" by everyone? Contrast the way Native Americans view the land and nature to the way the British settlers view the land. Cite evidence from the novel to support the viewpoints.

Native American Football Mascot

Have students share thoughts as to whether the Washington Redskins should be allowed to continue using their name or whether it is too offensive for Native Americans.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Deadly Diseases

Study the diseases brought by white settlers to which Native Americans had no immunity. Look up symptoms for each of the diseases. Based on the student research, have students discuss which disease might have devastated Little Hawk's village.

Gender Differences

Have students compare the roles of men and women in the Pokanoket tribe. Then have them compare these gender roles to those of the Pilgrim colony, as shown in the book. Have them write an opinion essay as to where they would have wanted to live during the time of the novel.

Historical Figures

Ghost Hawk takes place in the region where the Pokanoket tribe lived—the area that became the Massachusetts Bay Colony--and mentions several historical figures. Have your students learn more about one of the famous individuals who lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, including John Williams, Squanto, Miles Standish, Governor William Bradford, or Edward Winslow. Then have them write an acrostic poem that reveals each man's contribution to the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Different Cultural Perspectives

Much of the tension and misunderstandings in *Ghost Hawk* arise from the lack of trust between two cultures. Leaping Turtle distrusts all white settlers, and Thomas Medlycott states that even though the Native Americans have never attacked the settlers, "no savage c[an] be trusted." Have students rewrite a portion of the story from the opposite perspective from which it is told.

King Philip's War

Eventually the tensions between the white settlers and the Native Americans erupted into the bloody conflict known as King Philip's War. Have students learn more about this conflict, the casualties suffered on both sides, and how the war changed the relations between the involved parties.

Courtroom Drama

A Boston court banished Roger Williams and ordered him to return to England. Instead, he escaped to Rhode Island territory. Have students research Roger Williams' trial and then stage a drama of the court proceedings.

Puritan Religion

Have students research the Puritan religion and determine the central tenants. Then ask students to determine which of the characters in the novel behaved in accordance with the tenants of the religion. Make sure students cite page references to support their character behavior examples.

Strong Convictions

Have students write an opinion essay on whether they agree or disagree with the following idea spoken by Little Hawk near the end of the story: “Treasure your uncertainty then... Wrong choices come out of strong convictions that will not bend.” Have students cite examples from the story or from current events to support their position.

Native Americans Language

As shown in *Ghost Hawk*, Roger Williams was known for his ability to speak several Native American languages. Have students learn about the many languages spoken in North America at the time the settlers arrived and compare this figure to the number of Native American languages spoken today. Students should also look up the number of native speakers then and now. Have students create a map to show the distribution of Native American language speakers from the past and from today.

U.S. States Names with Native American Origins

The names of many U.S. states are derived from Native American words, for example Massachusetts. Have students create a list of these states and have them explain the meaning of the state’s name.

Life after Death

Little Hawk lives as a ghost through several hundred years. At one point he says, “I see much. And I wonder why I am left here to see, with no power at all to help the good or hinder the ill.” Have students select several religions to study and have them determine whether the adherents of each religion believe in life after death. What does that life after death look like in each of the religions?

Plants

Susan Cooper currently lives on an island in a salt marsh and has said that the landscape that surrounds her daily provided her with inspiration for the story. Have students find all the plant references in *Ghost Hawk* and then ask them learn more about their physical appearance and ecosystem. (Make sure students learn about the bitternut hickory tree that grew around the tomahawk used by Little Hawk).

Native Americans in Advertising Today

Have students find examples of Native American images in product marketing today. Then, have them write an opinion essay as to whether the images and/or slogans depict Native Americans in a positive, negative, stereotypical, or idealized way.

Last Wild Indian in California

Have students learn about Ishi, the last living member of the Yahi tribe of California, who lived his last years at in the University of California’s Museum of Anthropology. Ask students to write an essay on whether Ishi’s treatment in the last years of his life was appropriate.

Treaties with Native Americans

Andrew Jackson wrote to President James Monroe in 1817, "I have long viewed treaties with the Indians as an absurdity not to be reconciled to the principles of our government." Discuss with your class the meaning of this quote and whether they agree with its content. Then, have students research the treaties between the U.S. government and the Native Americans that were ignored or violated by the U.S. Create a complete list of the treaties.

U.S./Indian Battles

Have students learn about and then compare and contrast the battles of Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee. What happened at each of these conflicts and what was the greater significance of each battle?

Another Website with Activities for the Book

For other helpful ideas, see the Simon and Schuster Guide, written by Pat Scales, retired middle and high school librarian,

http://d28hgpr8am2if.cloudfront.net/tagged_assets/12840_ghost%20hawk_cg.pdf?cp_type=enkl&rmid=20130925_KidsLibrary_Sept&rriid=3249321