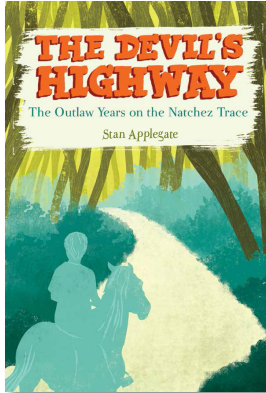


TEACHER'S GUIDE



The Devil's Highway

Written by Stan Applegate | Illustrated by James Watling

PB: 978-1-56145-184-5

Ages 8–12 | Historical Fiction
AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL T; Gr 5

Also available: *Natchez Under-the-Hill* | PB: 978-1-56145-191-3

ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1811, 14-year-old Zeb and 11-year-old Hannah team up to make their way down the dangerous Natchez Trace, a haven for thieves and murderers. Zeb, despite reports that his grandfather was killed on the Trace, is convinced that he is still alive and is determined to find him. Hannah, who escaped from her kidnappers, the treacherous Mason Gang, is trying to get home to her family and her Choctaw Indian friends. As they narrowly escape life-threatening situations on the Trace, Zeb and Hannah learn to value each other's survival skills, courage, and determination.

An Author's Note describes the history, dangers, natural phenomena, and Indians who lived along the Trace and encourages readers to visit the Trace today. Maps inside the front and back covers show the Natchez Trace and the United States as they existed in 1811. Mileposts at each chapter opener indicate location on the present-day Trace.

THEMES

- History, early 19th century America
- Determination, belief in oneself, courage
- Friendship
- Racism
- Native Americans
- Extinction of species
- Horses, training and treatment

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

Dr. Stanley Applegate's historical fiction series of early nineteenth century life on the treacherous Natchez Trace

is a natural springboard for multidisciplinary study. While field testing these novels on fifth and sixth grade students, I discovered that Zeb's and Hannah's adventures continually opened up new and fascinating topics for group and independent research, as well as for creative writing and art activities. My students were so excited and enthusiastic that they begged to be allowed to trade their recess time for more reading and to eat in the classroom while I read aloud to them.

And why not? The Natchez Trace or Devil's Backbone was overflowing with the colorful characters, both villainous and admirable, which fascinate so many of us in looking at the beginnings of our country's westward expansion. This quality of historical fiction allows students to realize that history is, after all, the story of people going about the business of living their lives. Many of the research ideas originated from student questions and discussions about historical and cultural aspects of the novels. Most of those described here are easily adapted to various age and ability levels. This guide encourages students to explore and pursue their interests within the realms of language arts, history and social studies, geography, psychology, science and nature, math, and the arts.

BEFORE YOU READ

- Discuss historical fiction as a genre with the class. Ask students the following questions: What is a literary genre? What examples of historical fiction have you read recently? How do you think an author would go about creating a work of historical fiction?
- As a class, create a timeline of the following

significant persons and events in American history: Thomas Jefferson elected president of the U.S., the Louisiana Purchase, James Madison elected president of the U.S., the War of 1812, Tecumseh at Tippecanoe, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Andrew Jackson (when he moved to Tennessee and when he was elected president), the Missouri Compromise, invention of the steamboat, and invention of the cotton gin. So students can gain some perspective, make sure to add to the timeline when your city or town was first settled and when your state was admitted to the Union.

- Using the timeline and other historical references, ask students to create a news article or a front page from a town newspaper in 1811. They can make their articles funny, informative, or sensationalistic, but they must have some basis in fact. Have them look at current newspaper articles for comparison and contrast. They can include political cartoons if they'd like. Have them research some of the celebrities, politicians, and outlaws of the day to include in their papers.

AS YOU READ

- Ask students how the characters develop? How do their actions, beliefs, and conversations help you understand the characters better? Give some examples.
- Based on what students know about each character, ask them to predict what he or she will do next.
- Ask students where this story fits in the timeline of historical events that the class mapped out in the pre-reading exercise.
- Have students discuss what they would do in certain situations that Hannah and Zeb find themselves in?

AFTER YOU READ

- Ask what drama, suspense, conflict, climax, conflict resolution, and cliffhanger mean? To which parts or events in the story would the students apply these literary terms?
- Discuss what feelings and thoughts students have about how the story ended. Would they want the story to have ended another way? Why or why not?
- Ask what the difference between a circular and a linear plot is. Is the plot line in *The Devil's Highway* circular or linear?
- Discuss what students expect each character will do in the next book?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

- At the end of Chapter 4, Zeb offers Hannah a blank book to write in. Create your own version of Hannah's diary using newsprint folded into eight or sixteen pages and wrapped with cloth. You might even try to write with an unusual pencil or pen you're not used to using. Begin your journal of the trip through Hannah's eyes. Make an entry for each day. Be descriptive and think about how Hannah must feel and think. Do you want Zeb to read some parts of your journal?
- Identify evolving themes in the novel. Trace the development of these through the actions of the characters as the novel progresses. Which of these themes are relevant today? (Note: Some themes might include coming of age, family relationships, racism, endangered species and extinction, man's inhumanity to man, and friendship. For example, at what point do Hannah and Zeb become friends? Who do you think benefits more from their friendship? What events draw them closer together? What events threaten their friendship? How might the story differ if they had not become friends? Do you have a friend you'd trust with your safety or your life?)
- Create an A-B-C illustrated rule book for traveling the Natchez Trace. Use your imagination! What sort of advice would you offer to other travelers of the trail? Try writing these in couplets or in Kaintuck dialect. Make the advice accurate, but funny perhaps.
- Create a diary or journal that gives us a peek into the life of one of the less admirable characters in the novel (such as Tate McPhee or the sergeant). Research well-known outlaws, thieves, and crimes of early nineteenth century America to give you ideas. (Maybe your journal could begin at the point when one of these characters has finally been jailed and is reflecting upon his life.) Use your imagination, but add details based on what you discover about daily life of the time period.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Divide the class into groups of five or fewer for these assignments.

- In 1810 a group of people left Natchez to settle in the Baton Rouge area on the Mississippi River, in what was then Spanish territory. Upon settling, they

established their own country, which they called The Republic of Feliciana. This country had its own government, laws, etc. Imagine that your group is about to establish your own country. Decide what laws, type of government, and customs you would choose. Be sure to discuss advantages and disadvantages. What aspects of your country differ from those of the U.S. today?

- Create a time capsule with at least ten items that Zeb and Hannah might have needed on their journey. Be sure to research what these items would have looked like and how they would have been used in 1811. (For example, what did the money of the time look like? Students could create facsimiles. Another item might be hard tack, later a staple of soldiers during the Civil War. Each choice should be based upon research.) Decorate the box as if it were a container or item from the story.
- Explore the world of the Choctaw through the writings and paintings of George Catlin (1796–1872). How do his descriptions of the ball playing compare with Zeb's experiences at Yowani? What other games did the Choctaw enjoy? Touch on subjects such as dwellings, foods, family life, customs, ceremonies, religion, and art. Give your oral presentation of Choctaw life dressed in Choctaw face paint! Design Choctaw props to aid you. (Could you recreate the Ishtaboli paddle or stick?)

GEOGRAPHY

- Based on the maps inside the book's covers, create your own large map of the Natchez Trace. Illustrate each stand or area where Zeb and Hannah stopped or had an adventure. Refer to topographical or landmark maps to help in your design. Create a symbol at important stops to reflect the action in the story.
- Identify Choctaw and Chickasaw territory. Compare and contrast past and current maps of the area. Design examples of the types of road signs or directions (if any) that Hannah and Zeb might have seen on the trail. (Students could look at landmark maps, which depict three-dimensional buildings, so they could show various stands along the way.)

PSYCHOLOGY

- Identify the conflicts that Zeb and Hannah encounter. What actions help to change or resolve these conflicts? How would *you* deal with each of these problems? (Note: Before each mini-resolution or action is read, brainstorm possibilities. Students could

compare or contrast Zeb and Hannah's and their own twenty-first century approaches and sensibilities.)

- Life on the Natchez Trace is dangerous, but sometimes Zeb and Hannah still act and feel like children. Create a game for them to carry along and play during their trip. Remember that they must be quiet, must be able to carry it easily, and can only use materials available along the trail. Share your game with the rest of the class. You might investigate some actual games and toys of the time period in both Native American and English speaking cultures. (Note: Another approach might be to provide each pair of students with a few select materials with the task to create an entertaining game for Zeb and Hannah.)
- Reread Chapter 13, in which the Choctaw play ishtaboli. First look at George Catlin's letters and illustrations (esp. no. 53, "Tullock-chish-ko") about Choctaw games. Make your own illustration of this event in the novel. Then research the game of lacrosse. In what ways are these games similar and different? Share with the rest of the class. (Reference: Catlin, George, *North American Indians*.)

SCIENCE & NATURE

- What were the fairy rings that Zeb saw next to Hannah in Chapter 2? Research these mushrooms to discover what they need to grow. Why do they sometimes grow in rings?
- Why do you think folktales and superstitions arise from natural occurrences? List five other superstitions or folk sayings about scientific phenomena. Be sure to explain the scientific causes of these "mysteries" as well as listing the superstitious sayings or beliefs. (Hint: Weather, agriculture, and animals considered harmful, such as snakes, are good topics to explore.)
- In Chapters 8–10, Zeb and Hannah witness the slaughter of hundreds of passenger pigeons. Research the plight of the passenger pigeon. What other wildlife and game were abundant in the Natchez Trace area at that time? What other species have suffered from the "progress" of westward expansion and population?
- Many of the Choctaw at Yowani suffered a fate common among Native Americans throughout the country once white settlers invaded their territory. What was variola or smallpox? Research the disease and other medical conditions of this time period, such as malaria, and the average health and life expectancies of settlers and Native Americans in early

nineteenth-century America. Interview a local doctor and consult written sources. Are there any comparable medical problems in our world today?

- Investigate the world of horses. Zeb and his grandfather practice an unusual method of handling and training their horses, a technique sometimes credited to the Choctaw. What breeds of horses do you think they raised? What is “gentling” of the horses? How valuable were horses during that time period? Design a tri-board or poster to depict some of the breeds commonly used by soldiers, farmers, and people of other professions. Are there comparable techniques for handling and training horses today? (Have you heard of the legends of horse whisperers?)

MATH

- Create a line graph that charts the amount of literary tension (from the drama and suspense of the story) as it builds, subsides, and builds again. Which events should be depicted in the graph? Because the conclusion is a cliff-hanger, how should the end of the graph appear?
- Using the mile markers at each chapter opening, figure out how many miles Zeb and Hannah traveled on their journey to Natchez. Chart their progress each day. How many days did it take for them to arrive in Natchez?
- How many miles per hour did they travel? Given a speed limit of 45 m.p.h. for vehicles on the Natchez Parkway today, how long would it take for a person to travel the same distance now?
- Plan such a journey, complete with stopping points and time allowed for rest and food. How many more days did it take Zeb and Hannah to complete the journey than it would a modern traveler to do so?

INTERNET INVESTIGATIONS

- What can you discover about the Natchez Trace on the web? (Hint: See the Author's Note at the back of the book.)
- Get the addresses of historical parks and sites along the highway. Compose a letter requesting additional information. Share your results with the class. How has the Natchez Trace changed since 1811? What remains the same?

ART

- Design and draw a wanted poster featuring Zeb. Look up examples of the type and quality of lettering, paper, and images on such posters. Or design and

draw a wanted poster featuring you! How might it feel to have such a poster hanging in many areas where friends and acquaintances could see it? What is your “crime”? What sort of reward would be offered for your capture?

- Research a Native American tribe near you. Create a papier-mâché or clay mask which imitates the masks of that tribe. Did all Native Americans use masks? For what purpose might your mask be used?
- Make a diorama or a three-dimensional model of one of the scenes which you found most interesting in the story. Be sure to carefully reread the descriptions, as well as research buildings, costumes, etc. Students may choose to work in groups of three or four to recreate settings, such as the ishtaboli scene. Use mixed media: clay, paper, cardboard, paints, wood.

DRAMA

- Divide the class into groups of five or fewer. You might want to videotape these student plays.
- Select your favorite chapter in the book. Rewrite the events into a mini-play to be performed for the rest of the class. How can you present action effectively in a limited space such as your classroom? Design costumes similar to what the characters might have worn.
- Think about the importance of this chapter in the whole novel. What is the most important message or theme you want your audience to get from your performance?

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

TRIVIA CHALLENGE

This assignment might work best with groups of seven or fewer students, each group being given a different category to explore. Be sure that cards of different categories are color coded and/or decorated uniquely. In the trivia contest, have the groups compete against one another, each group answering questions from all the categories.

- Review the author's notes at the end of the novel as well as the information you've discovered from your research about life in the southeastern U.S. during the early 1800s.
- When you receive your category, brainstorm and create thirty trivia cards. Trivia may range from the details of the novel's plot, setting, and characters to historical events of the time.

CELEBRATE

Students should research music, clothing, dance, cuisine, and furnishings. Make sure to videotape!

- Plan a homecoming celebration for Hannah's and Zeb's reunion with family and friends.
- What foods, music, and entertainment will you have?
- Come to the celebration dressed as a character from the novel.

REVIEWS

"A fast-paced story.... Broad strokes of historical details enrich the story line. Zeb and Hannah are able to sustain themselves, and the plot, with their pluck and determination."

—*School Library Journal*

"This story moves quickly and should be a good read for reluctant readers." —*Kliatt*

AWARDS

- Georgia Author of the Year (Best of Middle Reader Division) —Georgia Writers Association
- Volunteer State Book Awards (master list, 4–6) —Tennessee Association of School Librarians
- Best Books for Young Teen Readers —R. R. Bowker

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stan Applegate received a B.A. from Penn State University and an Ed.D. from Columbia University. He has held several positions within the education industry, including teacher in New York, South Carolina, and Bermuda; Expert in Education for the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Brazil; Deputy Director of the Latin American Regional Office of Education for UNESCO in Chile; and Chief of Education, Science, and Technology with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Egypt. He lives with his wife, a retired librarian, near Atlanta.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

James Watling was born in England and lives near Montreal, Quebec, Canada, where he is professor of art education at McGill University. He has illustrated more than twenty-five books, including *Seaman*, *The Tree That Owns Itself*, and *Natchez Under-the-Hill*.

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
THE DEVIL'S HIGHWAY

was prepared by Sherrie Drury Jamison, who based a curriculum on this book for her 5th and 6th grade students at Burghard Elementary School in Macon, Georgia.

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