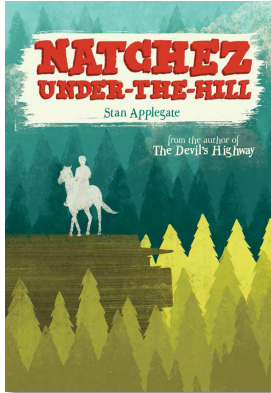


# TEACHER'S GUIDE



## Natchez Under-the-Hill

Written by Stan Applegate | Illustrated by James Watling

PB: 978-1-56145-191-3

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

**Also available:** *The Devil's Highway* | PB: 978-1-56145-184-5

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In this sequel to *The Devil's Highway*, Hannah must protect herself, her family, and Zeb against the evil Sergeant and the Mason Gang. Zeb finds his grandfather in Natchez but runs afoul of the Sergeant and horse thieves. Then while Hannah's family and the Army escort Zeb and Cracker Ryan back north along the Natchez Trace, the region is rocked by the New Madrid earthquake of December 15, 1811.

An Author's Note describes the history, dangers, and natural phenomena of the region. Maps inside the front and back covers show the Natchez Trace and the United States as they existed in 1811.

### THEMES

- History, early 19th century America
- Determination, belief in oneself, courage
- Friendship
- Coming of Age, Moral decision making
- Horses: training and treatment

### BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

Dr. Stanley Applegate's historical fiction series of early 19th century life on the treacherous Natchez Trace is a natural springboard for multidisciplinary study. While field testing these novels on 5th and 6th grade gifted 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 PE 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, psychology, and science.

### 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's election, the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, James Madison's election, the New Madrid earthquake, the War of 1812, Tippecanoe, Andrew Jackson's election, the Missouri Compromise, invention of the steamboat and the cotton gin.
- 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 students 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? Is the plot line in *Natchez Under-the-Hill* circular or linear?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### LANGUAGE ARTS

- In many situations in the novel, the adult characters are depicted as human and needy of help. In small groups, make a chart that lists the adult characters. What sort of clues does the author provide to help you figure out their personalities? How does he show you? Notice their body language, the physical postures and gestures that hint about what the characters are thinking. Locate passages of dialogue which also help. Which characters seem good, evil, strong, weak, or a combination? Back up your

opinions with examples.

- How does the method for communicating through mail affect the plot? Research the mail and any other methods of communication available in the Natchez area during the early 19th century. Share your findings with the class.

### SOCIAL STUDIES

- When they first meet, Dr. McAllister and Zeb spend some time discussing slavery, manumission, and the changing southern attitudes toward this issue. Research slavery and its effects upon the upcoming Civil War.
- Hannah experiences two kinds of prejudice: one from being half Indian-half white; and the other from having been associated with the outlaws, even though they had kidnapped her. What is prejudice, and how does it start? What can individuals do to stop prejudice?
- Research what a trial of 1811 might have been like. Then stage a trial for Tate McPhee, the Sergeant, or Dancey Moore. Select prosecutors, defense attorneys, judge, and jury to make the trial as authentic as possible. Invite another class to attend as the audience.
- Research and write an illustrated report of the various modes of transportation used in the novel. What developments were about to be made? How does the state of transportation during that time affect the story line? Explain your answers with specific examples of how more current transportation would have made the plot different.
- What sort of attitudes did most people of 1811 seem to have regarding animals? List several examples of the use and treatment of animals? How are views today about animals (domesticated and wild) alike or different from the ones shown in the novel? Which ones most closely resemble your own opinions and beliefs about this issue?
- Two major natural phenomena occur in the novel. What were they? How did the people of the area interpret these events? What are the real causes for each of these events? Does our contemporary society have any superstitions or unscientific interpretations about natural phenomena? Research the source of at least two of these. (Note: Be sure to read the Author's Note at the end of the book.)

## PSYCHOLOGY

One of the major themes of this novel is Zeb's transformation from child to young adult. Chart his journey to adulthood during the novel. Where does he take on adult responsibilities? When do we see him slip back into the role of child? Does he always recognize the gravity of his responsibilities? What moral choices does he make, and how might he have acted differently when he was younger? Give specific examples of his behavior. Now think of your own life. Are there any times when you've been expected to act more grown up? What were they? When do you most enjoy or feel the need to be treated like a child?

## SCIENCE

Compare and contrast medical practices of 1811 with those of today. How might the plot have changed if our current medical technology had been available to the characters in *Natchez Under-the-Hill* and *The Devil's Highway*? Cite specific examples when illness or treatment of injuries, etc., might have affected the outcome of the story.

## REVIEWS for *The Devil's Highway*

"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*

## 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. *Natchez Under-the-Hill* is his second novel.

## 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 *The Devil's Highway*.

## Peachtree Teacher's Guide for NATCHEZ UNDER-THE-HILL

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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