

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

## THE DESPERATE JOURNEY by Kathleen Fidler



www.florisbooks.co.uk

### Themes/issues addressed in this book

Highland clearances; child labour; emigration; differences between town- and country-living; Canada

### Book Summary

It's 1812, and Kirsty and David Murray, and their parents, James and Kate, are forced out of their home by the Highland Clearances. Although they are used to country living, they travel across Scotland to urban Glasgow, where they discover the hardships of slum-dwellings, child labour and poverty. Then they are offered the chance to emigrate to Canada. They embark on a perilous journey, encountering death, danger and violent rebellion along the way, before struggling to build a new life in the Red River Colony.

## BEFORE READING

### Group Activities

- Discussion: what is the difference between living in the country and living in a city? Which do you prefer? Where do you want to live when you grow up?
- Discussion: what is meant by 'child labour'? Does it still exist in this country? Where does it exist in other parts of the world? What kind of things do children do? Collect articles from newspaper, magazines, and the internet which discuss issues surrounding child labour and create a classroom display.

## AFTER READING

### Individual Work

- Write a paragraph on the feelings you had when
  - a) the house at Culmailie was set on fire
  - b) the emigrants saw Scotland disappear as the ship sailed
  - c) the Indian picked up the 'squaw child' and carried her home
- Emigration: the Murrays emigrate from Scotland to Canada. Do people still emigrate today? Can anyone go to live anywhere they choose? Why not? Choose a country to which you would like to emigrate. Write about all the things you would need to do to prepare for your journey.

### Group Activities

- Discussion: find maps of Scotland and Canada in the library, and trace the Murrays' journey.
- Discussion: thinking about your earlier 'child labour' discussion: how does Kirsty and David's experiences compare to those of modern-day working children?
- Group project: what happened in Scotland during the Highland clearances? What effect did it have on Scottish society?
- Group project on Canada: how far away is Canada? How would you travel there today? How long would it take by boat? What do you think life would be like in Canada? In groups, choose a part of Canada and describe what you would do if you went to live there: where would you live; what work would you do?

### Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean:

plucked	portage
peril	weary
eddying	powwow
improvised	kist
engrossed	ransom

### Kelpies Series Summary

*The award-winning Kelpies series is Scotland's favourite collection of children's fiction. Floris Books took over publication of these books in 2001. The series includes such classic novels as Kathleen Fidler's The Desperate Journey, Mollie Hunter's The Thirteenth Member, and Theresa Breslin's Simon's Challenge. Genres included in the series range from historical and folklore to detective and adventure stories.*

### CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

#### 5-14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P6-P7, S1-S3

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in groups

Talking about texts

Talking about experiences, feeling and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

#### National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stages 2 and 3

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, inc analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary