

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

LUCAS WHITAKER by Cynthia DeFelice



www.florisbooks.co.uk

Themes/issues addressed in this book

Superstition; Science and medicine in history

Book Summary

This story is based on historical fact. Set in the 1800s, it is about a boy called Lucas Whitaker who watches his whole family die of consumption. Traumatized, he sets off to get away from where it all happened. He finds a place to live and becomes apprenticed to a doctor in a nearby town. By working with the doctor he learns how to help people with toothache, poisoned limbs and other conditions. He finds out that there is no cure for the disease we now call TB (tuberculosis), but he comes across people carrying out the gory practice of trying to cure family members by digging up the body of the first family victim, taking out their hearts to burn up, and feeding the ashes to the next victim.

This is a graphic and fascinating tale, conveying the historical facts as well as the emotional turmoil.

BEFORE READING

Group Activities

- Discussion: what is meant by 'superstition?' Give examples of superstitions.
- Discussion: talk about science and medicine. What do we know about infectious diseases and how to stop them spreading? What infectious diseases are currently in the news?

AFTER READING

Individual Work

- Write a paragraph describing how you might feel if your family had been afflicted by TB and had died. What might happen to you these days?
- Find out if this situation existed in this country or was particular to the USA

Group Activities

- Discussion: what could they have done to avoid getting TB?
- Discussion: talk about the way the doctor was paid. Do people always pay in money these days, or can they sometimes trade goods for services?
- Discussion: talk about what kinds of medicine we use now. Talk about Moll, the woman in the woods. What kind of plants did she find for the doctor? Do you know any plants that help you to feel better either by rubbing it on to your skin or by taking it and swallowing it?

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean:
 - weariness
 - gaunt
 - lurch
 - squeamish
 - hoisted
 - apprentice
 - cauterize
 - riled
 - dissection
 - false
 - deserted

FLYWAYS

Series Summary

Flyways was conceived in response to the general decline in children's literacy levels. The series provides high quality, imaginative and thought-provoking fiction to children who are currently unchallenged by the majority of available reading material. The Flyways series includes a high percentage of prize-winning international literature, as well as books by new and established authors.

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