



Lucky's Mountain

Dianne Maycock

Interest level: ages 8–11

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112 pages

AR Quiz # 120578

Consider the following question as you read *Lucky's Mountain*:

How does Lucky live up to his name?

Story

Maggie Sullivan's world has fallen apart. Forced to leave her close-knit mining community perched atop a mountain in British Columbia, she must also abandon Lucky, the three-legged dog that was a special gift from Pa. As she tries desperately to find a home for a mutt that nobody wants, Maggie finds herself confronting an angry mine owner, a bullying classmate and a savage-looking tramp who might be a murderer. It will take all her courage to find the right solution for Lucky and for herself.

Author

Dianne Maycock has always wanted to write books about animals and is thrilled that her first children's book features a very special dog. Dianne currently shares her Victoria, British Columbia, home with two cats, Tiger and Ferdy, who love to steal her favorite writing chair and "read" the computer screen while she's working. *Lucky's Mountain* is based, in part, on Dianne's mother's stories of growing up in a mining town in BC. As part of the research for *Lucky's Mountain*, Dianne spent a lot of time "interviewing" her mother, an activity that both of them enjoyed very much.

Author Website

<http://diannemaycock.com>

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- At the beginning of *Lucky's Mountain*, Maggie's mother receives a letter that will change Maggie's life. Have students write three journal entries as either Maggie or her mother, setting out how the changes will affect them and how they feel about it.
- Ask students to visualize the following phrase from chapter 3: *And now loyalty had just winged away on the mountain breeze*. Have them write or draw all the things that come to mind. Share the results in small groups and discuss similarities and differences. This activity can be done with other phrases from *Lucky's Mountain* as well.
- "Looks can be deceiving," "Things are not always as they seem" and "A picture is worth a thousand words" are sayings that refer to our perceptions of what we see. Have students explain what each statement means and find an example from the story to support it. For example: Louie Jenkins has the reputation of being crazy because of the way he looks; Maggie thinks Jock is trying to harm Lucky when he has his rope tied around his neck.
- Maggie has to make choices and decisions that will affect her future. Have students write alternative scenarios where she makes the opposite choices. For example: not giving the gold nugget to Louie; not going to the river alone; or not going to see Mr. Winters.
- In chapter 14, instead of eating a hunk of cheese, Lucky "wolfed" it down. Assign students the following:
 1. Why do you think *wolfed* is a good word to describe what Lucky is doing?
 2. Can you find some other examples of interesting verbs?
 3. Write a story about an adventure you have had, using as many interesting verbs as possible.
- At the end of the book, Louie asks Maggie to write him a letter about Patches' adventures in Vancouver. Ask students to imagine that they are Maggie writing the letter that Louie will read to Lucky and Sadie.
- Have students write a different ending to the story using one of the following suggestions or one of their own endings:
 1. Mama and Elly get jobs and are allowed to stay on the mountain.
 2. Maggie finds a way to take Lucky to the city with her.
 3. Maggie finds someone other than Louie to take care of Lucky.

Social Studies

- During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many people lost all that they had. In *Reading is Seeing*, Jeffrey Wilhelm poses the following question: “What happens when structures in one’s life break down?” Share this question with students and guide them in a discussion of it in the context of *Lucky’s Mountain*.
- How do towns, cities, streets, mountains and other geographic features get their names? Challenge students to find out how the following places in *Lucky’s Mountain* got their names: Pig Valley, Lucky’s Mountain, Number Five Mine, Seal Rock and Logan’s Trail. Find out how some places in your area got their names.
- *Lucky’s Mountain* is loosely based on the coal mining community of Blakeburn, which was located near Princeton, British Columbia. On August 13, 1930—a day known as Black Wednesday—there was a deadly mine explosion. Have students research Black Wednesday (or even a different mine disaster) and write a newspaper article about the event.
- The town upon which this story is based only existed from the 1920s until the 1940s, when the coal ran out and they closed the mine. It is now a ghost town. Assign students to research a British Columbia ghost town of their choosing and write a report about what they discover.
- How much would Maggie’s gold nugget have been worth in the 1930s? How much would it be worth now?

Art

- Using every possible clue from the book, have students draw a detailed map of the mountaintop village.
- Draw large full-length portraits of the characters in *Lucky’s Mountain*.
- Dogs like Snoopy, Ace and Odie can be found in comic strips or books. Gather and share these and other comics and books that feature dogs. Invite students to design a comic strip using Lucky as the main character with events from *Lucky’s Mountain* as the content.
- After reading *Lucky’s Mountain*, have students draw a new cover, selecting the images they felt to be the most powerful from the story. Ask each student to provide a paragraph explaining his or her choice.
- Divide *Lucky’s Mountain* into six to eight sections and have groups of students tell the story through illustrations. Display the illustrations in the order that they occur. Have each group explain their choices of illustrations.

- On the first few pages of *Lucky's Mountain*, Maggie describes her Aunt Hortense as "Auntie Horseface." Draw Aunt Hortense based on your image of Maggie's words.
- In *Lucky's Mountain*, Pa and Maggie collect beautiful eagle feathers. Use objects from nature such as feathers, pinecones, small pebbles and dried leaves to create a collage that would represent the town.

Science

- Many things we use in our world come from under the ground. Examples: gold, diamonds, oil, coal, salt, zinc and jade. Divide the class into small groups to research the techniques used for mining these and other minerals.
- Mining is done either on the surface or underground. In *Lucky's Mountain*, Maggie's father is killed in an underground mining accident. The common types of underground mining are: slope and shaft. Find out more about each mining type along with the risks and benefits associated with each.
- Have students research and discuss the phrase "a canary in a coal mine."
- Many unexpected products are made from coal, including baking powder, paint thinner and soda water! Divide students into pairs and challenge them to make a list of some other products we use today that are made from coal.

Drama

- Maggie is faced with the problem of having to leave behind something she loves. Brainstorm some other situations where this might happen. Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them act out possible solutions to such dilemmas.
- Jock bullies Maggie and Lucky. Have students create short skits that illustrate a bullying situation with both a positive and negative outcome.
- Maggie finds a gold nugget in the river and immediately thinks about how it will change her current situation. In small groups, have students act out possible ways in which her life might change.
- Maggie has an old trunk that contains items that remind her of her father. Divide the class into three to four groups. Using something like a cardboard box or a plastic container, have them put items into it that are connected in some way to *Lucky's Mountain*. Have each group display their items and talk about them briefly, and have the others guess the part of the story they represent.

Connecting to the Text

- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, a book's plot follows one of four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ *Person against nature.* Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ *Person against person.* Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 - ◆ *Person against society.* Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 - ◆ *Person against self.* Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.
 Guide students in a discussion of the kinds of conflict pattern in *Lucky's Mountain*. Is there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?
- Like plot, setting and characters, *theme* is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Lucky's Mountain*.
- Guide students in completing a character sketch of Maggie. Have them select eight to ten adjectives that describe her. Then answer the following questions:
 1. Which qualities do you think helped Maggie most during the story?
 2. Were there any qualities you think harmed Maggie during the story? Explain.
 3. Which of the qualities listed above describe you? Why?
- In chapter 14, Lucky is chased out of Louie's barn by an angry gray tabby cat. Dianne Maycock uses descriptive words to show the cat's emotional state: *The cat stopped a few feet away. It arched its back, scowled ferociously at Lucky and let out a sizzling hiss. It looked like an angry raccoon.* Have students find other passages in the book where the author shows action and emotion in this way. Challenge students to look at some of their own writing and find places where they can make their story's action more compelling by using descriptive "showing" language like this.

- Without using the words “hot” or “dry,” the author is still able to evoke the feeling of drought in the following passage from the beginning of chapter 13:

The sun beat down hard on Maggie’s head as she trudged along the road. Lucky, trotting ahead, kicked up wispy dust devils with every step. Even the weeds drooped, as if they couldn’t be bothered to hold their stems straight. She couldn’t remember the last time it had rained.

Discuss with students how the words in the passage evoke the feeling of drought. Assign students to write in a similarly evocative way about a thunderstorm, a tornado or a blizzard.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Maggie says her father was the one person who understood her better than anyone else in the whole world. Do you have a similar person in your life? Explain.
2. In chapter 2, Jock and his friend bully Maggie. How does Maggie react? What do you admire about her reaction? How could she have reacted differently?
3. Why is Maggie so resistant to letting Louie take care of her dog?
4. Louie chose to hide away from the outside world after being disfigured as a young man. As you see it, what were the reasons for this decision? Do you think Louie would have had as hard a time in the “real” world as he imagined he would? Why or why not?
5. Louie tells Maggie that Lucky is trying to move on the best he can. Why does the dog do this?
6. Maggie doesn’t always behave very politely: she throws folders in Mr. Winters’s face; she shouts at Louie, saying that she hates him; and she walks away from Louie without answering him when he says goodbye. What do you think of Maggie’s behavior? Discuss.
7. Maggie blames her mother for a lot of the pain she has to go through in giving up Lucky. How is she right? How is she wrong? Have you ever blamed an adult for making you do something that was difficult to do, yet you knew had to be done?
8. People and animals who look different are sometimes perceived to be less worthy than sound-bodied people. How is this shown in *Lucky’s Mountain*? Is it true? Discuss.
9. Why do you think Jock grew nicer toward the book’s end?

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Although both my parents were young children during the Great Depression of the 1930s, they lived very different lives. My dad grew up on a farm in an area of Saskatchewan that was hit hard by the Depression. Dad had plenty to eat since his family grew their own food, but they had very little money. Like all the other families in the area, they had no radio, no television, no newspapers and no electric lights. What they did have were horses (for riding to school), sloughs to swim in during the hot summer months, and home-made skating rinks (although they couldn't afford any skates). To play hockey, Dad and his brothers wore ordinary leather shoes, made sticks from old pieces of wood and used frozen clumps of ice for pucks. Even though his family was very poor, my dad remembers his childhood as a time of incredible happiness.

My mom, on the other hand, grew up in a company mining town very much like the community described in *Lucky's Mountain*. Her dad was a mining engineer. As Pa says in *Lucky's Mountain*, children in most of the company towns were "lucky." The company provided everyone with plenty of good food, a wide variety of sports activities, and special events like the enormous town Christmas tree with a present underneath it for each child. Even though my mother heard about the Great Depression, it didn't really affect her at all, and she felt that she had a very privileged childhood.

One activity Mom remembers fondly is attending the Saturday night dances with her whole family; babies would be laid to sleep all around the room while everyone else ate and danced. She also remembers visiting the mine horses in the town barn and feeding them carrots and apples. Since my mom had four brothers, she grew up as a real tomboy, playing hockey at the town rink (with skates and proper hockey sticks). She also played baseball and tennis in the summer on fields provided by the company. One of her fondest memories is of clustering around the radio on Friday nights with her brothers to listen to the hockey games.

During the winters the town was often cut off completely from the rest of the world. Groups of children would shoot down the mountain on giant sleds provided by the company. Then they would load the sleds onto the little tram that hauled supplies up the mountain, climb back up the hill and zoom down all over again.

My mom loved her life in the close-knit mining community, and she was very, very sad when the mine closed and everyone had to move away.

Even though I also had a happy childhood growing up in a big city with cars, televisions and electric lights, I sometimes think that I could have had just as much (or even more) fun growing up in a small town during the Great Depression. What about you?

Happy reading,
Dianne

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Barkhouse, Joyce. *Pit Pony*
 Bauer, Marion Dane. *Runt*
 Beveridge, Cathy. *Chaos in Halifax: Shadows of Disaster*
 Booth, David. *The Dust Bowl*
 Bunting, Eve. *A Train to Somewhere*
 DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn Dixie*
 Galloway, Priscilla. *The Trail to Golden Cariboo*
 Harlow, Joan Hiatt. *Star in the Storm*
 Harris, Dorothy. *Ellen: Hobo Jungle*
 Horne, Constance. *The Tenth Pupil*
 Horne, Constance. *Trapped by Coal*
 Lawson, Julie. *Emily: Summer of Gold*
 Lee, Chinlun. *Good Dog, Paw!*
 Lied, Kate. *Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression*
 Nickle, Jon. *The Ant Bully*
 Pendziwol, Jean E. and Martine Goubault. *The Tale of Sir Dragon*
 Reynolds, Marilyn. *Goodbye to Griffiths Street*
 Shouse, Nancy. *Any Pet Will Do*
 Stewart, Sarah. *The Gardener*
 Thomas, Jane Resh. *The Comeback Dog*
 Wallace, Ian. *Boy of the Deeps*
 Walsh, Ann. *Moses, Me and Murder*
 Whyne, Susanne Santoro. *Petropolis*

Nonfiction

- Bachusky, Johnnie. *Ghost Town Stories III: Tales of Dreams, Tragedies and Heroism in British Columbia* (971.2)
 Clark, John. *Mining to Minerals* (333.8)
 Darling, Kathy. *ABC Dogs* (636.7)
 Drake, Jane. *Mining* (622)
 Fleming, R.B. *General Stores of Canada* (971)
 Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading* (372.47)
 Gear, Adrienne. *Reading Power* (372.47)
 Francis, Daniel. *Far West, The Story of British Columbia* (971.1)
 Freedman, Russell. *Children of the Great Depression* (305.2)
 Harvey, Stephanie and Goudvis, Anne. *Strategies that Work* (372.47)
 Hausman, Gerald. *Dogs of Myth: Tales From Around the World* (398.2)
 Hinde, John R. *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal Mining Industry on Vancouver Island* (333)
 Kalman, Bobbi. *The Life of a Miner* (622)

- Langston, Laura. *Pay Dirt! The Search for Gold in British Columbia* (971.1)
Matthews, Sheelagh. *Mining* (338.2)
Nelson, Sheila. *Crisis at Home and Abroad: The Great Depression, World War II, and Beyond (How Canada Became Canada)* (971.06)
Place, Marian T. *Cariboo Gold, The Story of the British Columbia Gold Rush* (971.11)
Taylor, G.W. *Mining: The History of Mining in British Columbia* (338.2)
Varney, Philip. *Ghost Towns of the Pacific Northwest: Your Guide to Ghost Towns, Mining Camps and Historic Forts of Washington, Oregon and British Columbia* (917.95)
Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Reading is Seeing* (372.4)

Online

Free Coal Kit from the Coal Association of Canada

www.coal.ca/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=7&Itemid=27

Historical Gold Prices—1833 to present (PDF document)

www.nma.org/pdf/gold/his_gold_prices.pdf

Then and Now: Prices Compare Prices During the Great Depression to Prices Today

<http://killeenroos.com/5/1930prices.html>

What On Earth? Newsletter for Earth Sciences

www.earth.uwaterloo.ca/services/whaton

Index of Famous Dogs

www.citizenlunchbox.com/famous/dogs-A-D.html

Good Character—Character Education

www.goodcharacter.com

Character Counts

www.charactercounts.org

BC Museum of Mining—National Historic Site

www.bcmuseumofmining.org

Types of Mining

www.detroitsalt.com/mining-types.htm

Mining Techniques

www.crowsnest.bc.ca/coal06.html

Great Depression of Canada

www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/projects/canadianhistory/depression/depression.html

The Mill at Britannia Mine

www.theconcentrator.ca

Coal: a Fossil fuel

www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energyfacts/sources/non-renewable/coal.html

Mineral Resources Education Program

www.bcminerals.ca/files/teacher_resources.php

History of Mining in British Columbia

www.empr.gov.bc.ca/Mining/Pages/History.aspx