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Teachers: Suggested Classroom Activities
THE HIGHER POWER OF LUCKY by Susan Patron
Created by Sandy Schuckett

LANGUAGE ARTS

VOCABULARY:

The author uses several words that may be unfamiliar to students. Students may use a dictionary to find the definitions for the following words: (page numbers where the words are used are in parentheses)

anonymous (1); antivenom (4); banquette (36); boom town (31); capillaries (17); commodities (35); crevices (6); enzymes (19); evolved (54); inventory (26); pension (23); secretions (68); specimen (44); splendiferous (2)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The following questions can be used for a classroom discussion, for discussion among students in small groups, or as prompts for writing.

1. Lucky is looking for her Higher Power throughout this story. What did that term mean to her and what does it mean to you?
2. Lucky's survival kit is very important to her. If you were to create your own survival kit, what would you put in it? Why?
3. Lucky thinks about the things she can change in her life and the things she can't. What would you change about your own life and what would you keep the same?
4. Lucky mentions different compartments or crevices in her brain where she puts things she doesn't want to think about at the moment. Does the human brain really have different compartments? Describe times when you tried to ignore specific thoughts you were having.
5. Do you think Lucky had a crush on Lincoln in the story? Which words did the author use to make you feel this?
6. Miles loved the book *Are You My Mother?* Why do you think this book was so important to him? (If you don't remember the book, you might want to re-read it.)

7. Lucky speaks often of her “meanness gland.” She was very mean to Miles at different times in the story. Why do you think she reacted this way? Describe a situation where you felt the need to be mean to someone, even though you knew it was wrong.
8. What do you think made Lucky change her attitude toward Miles near the end of the story when they were stranded in the desert? Describe an experience where you changed your feelings about someone because of what was happening to you both?
9. Compare Lucky’s life in Hard Pan with your life in your town or city. How are they the same? How are they different? Which do you prefer? Why?
10. Lucky thinks often of the idea of “hitting rock bottom.” What does it mean to hit rock bottom? Have you ever had similar feelings? How did you solve your problems? Do you think running away was a good way for Lucky to solve her problems? Why or why not?
11. The author uses humor in several parts of this story. Which parts made you laugh? Why?
12. Do you think Lucky found her Higher Power? What do you think it was?

GEOGRAPHY/SOCIAL STUDIES

Several California locations are mentioned in the story: Hard Pan, Independence, Mojave Desert, Sierra City, and Talc Town. Some of these places are real and some are fictional. Students can use an atlas or search online to find which ones actually exist, and they can then locate the real ones on a California map.

Many terms are used that describe desert phenomena: dry streambed, dry wash, dust storm, windstorm. Students can search in dictionaries, geography textbooks, or online sources for information to describe these conditions. They can create their own glossary.

In the story, there are places where the characters hear a traffic report on the radio about southern California freeways and highways. Students can use a California road map to find the locations or they can look online for traffic patterns.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Students can search for information on any (or all) of the following topics to enhance their understanding of the issues that affect Lucky and the other characters in the story.

California mining towns: Students can compare life in Lucky's time in a deserted mining town with life in the past when the town was active.

Charles Darwin and his ship, the HMS Beagle serve as an inspiration to Lucky, both in choosing her dog's name and in her desire to become a scientist. Students can find more information on Darwin and his ship.

Foster children: Lucky is afraid of becoming a foster child. How would this make her life different?

Presidents: Lincoln is named after U.S. Presidents Lincoln, Clinton, Carter, and Kennedy, because his mother hopes he will become president some day. Why do you think his mother chose the names of those particular presidents? Students can search for information on these presidents, using a variety of print and online sources.

12-step programs: How do they work to help people stop bad habits?

U.S. Government Surplus food program: How does it work? What foods do people in need receive? How do they decide who gets the food?

Weather: Weather in the desert played a very important part in the story. Students can use an almanac or online weather sources to discover what the weather is like during May and June in the California desert areas. They can create a chart plotting the temperatures and the weather conditions for the months of May and June, the months when the story takes place.

SCIENCE

Many desert animals and insects are mentioned in the story: ants, black widow spiders, burros, chukars, craneflies, crickets, hoverflies, lizards, owls, rattlesnakes, red racer snakes, scorpions, sidewinders, tarantula hawk wasps, and tarantulas. Students can find information on these animals, and create illustrations and lists of facts which can be used for a classroom display or bound together in a book.

Students can also find information on desert plants: cactus, cholla, creosote, Joshua trees, locust, and tamarisk. They can create a similar classroom display or book of illustrations and facts.

The story mentions Sun Tea and Sammy's chili, and the Clafouti that Brigitte often prepared. Students can search for recipes for these items, and perhaps concoct them in the classroom or at home.

ART

Lincoln is ultimately described by Lucky as a "knot artist." Students can learn how to tie different types of knots and examples of these can be used in a classroom display.

Students can use a variety of materials to make detailed models or dioramas of different scenes in the story: the town of Hard Pan, the area of the dugouts where Lucky went when she ran away, Short Sammy's water tank house, and the area where Lucky's three-trailer home was situated are some possibilities. Students might think of others.

RESOURCES - ONLINE

The International Guild of Knot Tyers (of which Lincoln was one of the youngest members) has a Beginners section on their website: www.igkt.net/beginners/what.php which shows pictures and names of various types of knots and provides instructions for tying them.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture website provides information related to surplus food programs: <http://tinyurl.com/5c7u5r>

Recipes can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/o2x2w> This link leads to a recipe for Three-bean Chili, and others can be found there also. A recipe for Clafouti can be found at <http://recipes.epicurean.com/recipe/4141/cherry-clafouti.html>

Desert weather can be found at: www.wunderground.com

Southern California traffic patterns can be found at: www.sigalert.com

FOR FURTHER READING

Here are several books that can expand students' knowledge and understanding of various topics mentioned in *The Higher Power of Lucky*. Suggested grade levels are in parentheses. For additional titles, visit your school or public library.

Adkins, Jan, *String: Tying it Up, Tying it Down*. Scribner's, 1992. (4+)

Arnosky, Jim, *Watching Desert Wildlife*. National Geographic, 2002. (2-3)

Belden, L. Burr, et al, Death Valley to Yosemite: Frontier Mining Camps and Ghost Towns. Spotted Dog Press, 2000. (5+)

Collins, Barbara J. Key to Trees and Shrubs of the Deserts of Southern California. Lutheran College, 1976. (4+)

Dole, Jim W., An Amateur Botanist's Identification Manual for the Shrubs and Trees of the Southern California Deserts. Foot-Loose Press, 1996. (4+)

DuBosque, D.C., Draw! Desert Animals. Peel Productions, 1997. (4+)

Fredericks, Anthony D., Around One Cactus: Owls, Bats, and Leaping Rats. Dawn Publications, 2003. (2-3)

Green, Jen, A Saguaro Cactus. Crabtree Publishing, 1999. (3-4)

Savage, Stephen, Animals of the Desert. Raintree, 1997. (2-3)

Sherrow, Victoria, Life During the Gold Rush. Lucent Books, 1998. (4-5)

Steele, Christy, Desert Animals. Steadwell Books, 2002. (4-5)

Stetson, Emily, 40 Knots to Know. Williamson Publishing, 2002. (4+)

Stone, Lynn M, Animal Life in the Desert. Rourke, 1997. (2-3)

Stone, Lynn M., Desert Animals at Night, Rourke, 1997. (2-3)

Wilgocki, Jennifer, Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care. Magination Press, 2002. (4+)

Young, Daniel, The Paris Café Cookbook. Morrow, 1998. (4+) (Clafouti recipe – p.155)