

***The Lost Village of Central Park***, by Hope Lourie Killcoyne, is a story set in Seneca Village, a small community of African Americans and European immigrants in what is now Central Park. The Civil War is approaching and the Fugitive Slave Law, which makes it illegal to hide runaway slaves, has recently been passed. Two young girls, Soony Taylor and Kayla McBean, risk their lives to help hide slaves who pass through Seneca Village on their way to freedom in Canada. In the process, they are exposed to the complicated issues of race and class relations. Ultimately they learn the important aspects of friendship which allow people to cross these boundaries.

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading ***The Lost Village of Central Park***, discuss with the class what they already know about the Underground Railroad and the Civil War. After sharing responses, read the title and tell them the story takes place during the time leading up to the war.

Some questions for discussion might be:

- All of this story takes place in New York in 1855. Where does it fit in chronologically with other historical events already studied?
- What do you think the word “lost” means in the title?
- Look at the map at the beginning of the book. Within Seneca Village, note the landmarks that are mentioned. Students may refer back to this map during their reading to better understand the setting and movement of the characters.
- Have any students been to Central Park? Visited the West Side of the park between 81st and 86th streets? What are their impressions of this area now? If you have a current map available, notice what is located in that section of the park now.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

#### Literature • Social Studies • Art • Writing

1. After reading a few chapters of the book, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature, a mixture of fact and fiction. Some of the characters in the story actually existed and many of the events really occurred. The characters that are created by the author shared some of the experiences and feelings of real people who lived at the time. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and characters in the story using the sources listed in the “Reading List/Selected Sources” section on page 87. Students may be particularly interested in exploring the Web site created by the

New-York Historical Society. Have a mini-lesson about how to use these sources and a class “debriefing.” What names and events could they read about in other sources? Which were most likely created by the author?

2. This story exposes children to what New York City was like in the 1850’s and how slaves escaped to freedom on the Underground Railroad, but it does not tell the whole story. Encourage them to dig a little deeper into the past to discover more information:

- This story took place in the early 1850’s before the beginning of the Civil War. What else was happening in New York and nearby towns around the same time?
- What other information can you find about the Underground Railroad? How do you think children your age might have experienced this risky escape to freedom?
- Choose any aspect of the Underground Railroad or Civil War to investigate further. Brainstorm a list of possible topics as a class.

3. The book begins with Soony Taylor trying to decipher the secret message in a quilt used to guide slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad. Make a list of the patterns and clues that are mentioned in the book, (i.e., arrow-like triangles advised which direction was safest; tumbling boxes showed time to escape, etc.). Send a group of students to the library to find books on quilts. Can they find pictures of American quilts from the 1800’s, perhaps even quilts used on the Underground Railroad? Have students design their own “secret message quilts” on large pieces of construction paper. Display them on a clothesline slung across a hallway bulletin board, and ask other classes to visit and try to decipher the hidden messages.

4. Soony and Kayla were breaking the law by helping slaves escape to Canada. Pose these and related questions to your students for a discussion: Was this right? Are there situations when you think it would be o.k. to break a school or family rule? Would you still be punished? Would you break the rule anyway, even if you knew you would be punished? As a class make a list of situations when students think it might be o.k. to break a rule. Divide students into small groups to perform skits about their ideas.

5. Reread the description on pages 21-23 about Soony’s day as a student teacher. What are your students’ impressions? Soony and her 11-years-old classmates regularly took turns teaching the younger students in their school. Speak with the kindergarten and/or first grade teachers at your school about having your students visit to do a lesson in their classes. Before their student teaching experience, conduct several mini-lessons on topics such as “What qualities does a good teacher have?”; “What makes a lesson fun and interesting for young children?”; “What can a teacher do if children aren’t listening?” Give your students plenty of time to plan their lesson, and if there’s time, practice giving the lesson to part of their own class

first. (Working in pairs as team-teachers might be less intimidating to your students.) Feedback from all students and teachers involved would be an important part of this project.

6. It used to be that girls and boys had different jobs and chores. On page 36, Kayla notes that there are many differences in the daily activities of boys and girls. Do students notice any responsibilities/opportunities that are different in their school or home for boys versus girls? Is this fair? Should this be changed? If yes, how? Ask students to write a letter to the principal, you, their parents, or another leader describing an unfair situation and how it could be remedied.

#### **COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY**

##### **Exploring the past and future with Maps!**

Go to your public library to look at maps of your town or city 50, 100, or even 200 years ago if they exist. Have students locate where their homes, school and other landmarks existed. What was standing then? What has been added? Have students interview older town residents about how the area has changed. Pictures and information could be displayed in a class book or hallway bulletin board.

After exploring existing maps of your area, have students design a new park for their town or city. Ask students to think carefully about where the park will be located and how area residents may be affected. Remember that Seneca Village was destroyed to make the current Central Park. If there is a current construction project in your area, you might invite a city planner in to speak about how different community members responded and were affected and/or compensated by the development.

Before sending students off to work in pairs or small groups to design their park, collect books and pictures of many other parks. Visit existing parks in the area, if possible. Have students list their favorite parks, and why they like them, also noting what makes certain parks less appealing. Each group should begin with a list of features they plan to include in their design. Students could move from one dimensional to three dimensional designs for their final presentation. Invite other classes, parents, perhaps even town or city leaders to examine the models at a culminating party.

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# TEACHERS GUIDE

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