



CHILD *of the* MOUNTAINS

*Educators Guide*



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## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to write a two-page description of the Appalachian Mountain people. Have them read their papers in class and share where they gained their knowledge or notions about this culture. Instruct the class to flag the ideas that appear to be fact and those that seem to be fiction. Ask them to justify the “flags.”

# ABOUT THE BOOK

Grades 4–7

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GLB: 978-0-375-98969-8

EL: 978-0-375-98929-2

*Set in 1953 in a mining town of West Virginia, sixth-grader Lydia Hawkins is determined to find a way to clear her mama’s name after she is unjustly jailed.*

Lydia, her little brother, BJ, Mama, and Gran are poor Appalachian Mountain folks, but they love one another and that’s all that really matters. Then BJ and Gran die, and Mama is unjustly jailed. Feeling lonely and confused by what life has handed her, Lydia goes to live with Uncle William and Aunt Ethel Mae in the nearby town of Confidence, West Virginia. Lydia is lonely for Mama and her old life. The girls in her new school call her names and make fun of her tattered clothes and the way she talks. Lydia is determined to clear her mama’s name, but new issues arise when she finds that her uncle has been harboring a family secret that involves her. Then Mr. Hinkle, her sixth-grade teacher, and his fiancée, a lawyer, help her rekindle the courage and hope deep inside her—something she needs to bring her mama home.



## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS: Questions for Group Discussion

**FAMILY**—Family is extremely important to the Appalachian people. Describe Lydia’s family. Mama and Gran always said that they were very rich, but didn’t have much money. Discuss their wealth. Lydia and BJ have an exceptional relationship. At what point does Lydia realize that she is something special to BJ? What is significant about Uncle William asking Lydia if her daddy ever hit her?

**HOME**—Lydia says, “I don’t think Uncle William’s house will ever feel like home.” (p.11) Discuss the difference between a house and a home. Suggest things that Uncle William and Aunt Ethel Mae could do to make their house more like a home for Lydia.

**LONELINESS**—Explain what Lydia means when she says, “Sometimes a body can feel all alone, even when other people live in the same house.” (p. 2) She is very lonely for Mama and wants to write her a letter. Discuss why Aunt Ethel Mae won’t allow it. The girls at school shun Lydia and call her names. How does this contribute to her loneliness?

**GUILT**—Ask students to explain why Lydia feels that it is her fault that Mama is in jail. Debate how her strict religious upbringing confuses her and contributes to her guilty feelings. Why does she feel that she let BJ down? Explain Lydia’s feelings of guilt when she finds out that her birth mother died in childbirth.

**COURAGE**—Lydia is courageous in ways that she doesn’t recognize. How does it take courage for Lydia to confront Uncle William about the truth regarding her birth? Discuss how Mr. Hinkle helps Lydia gain the courage to confront her demons. Miss Parker wants to help Lydia, but Lydia needs to trust her. How does it take courage for Lydia to trust anyone from the outside?

**VALUES IN CONFLICT**—Lydia is angry because she feels that Mama and Gran lied by not telling her the truth about her birth. Ask students to debate whether withholding such information is really lying. At what point does Lydia forgive them? Mama says that they need to tell Ethel Mae the truth because “secrets cause shame.” (p. 245) Make predictions about how Aunt Ethel Mae will react when she finds out that Lydia belongs to William.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—Lydia’s favorite novel is *Anne of Green Gables*. Discuss the qualities in character that Anne and Lydia share. Then ask students to make an annotated bibliography of an additional 10 novels that Lydia may enjoy.

Ask students to become newspaper reporters, and write a news story for the Charleston, West Virginia, newspaper about Lydia’s mama’s trial. Remind them of the Who, What, When, and Where rules of newspaper reporting. Interview key witnesses.

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—Uncle William is a member of a union that helped eliminate unfair payroll practices at the coal mine. Ask students to research the United Mine Workers of America. Have them prepare a short presentation about the history of the organization and what they do for union potential members.

**SCIENCE/HEALTH**—Gran takes Lydia to “Nature’s School” and teaches her about healing plants and herbs. Ask students to find out the medicinal uses of the following: coltsfoot, horehound, lungwort, licorice, pleurisy roots, milkweed root and dandelion leaves. Then have them make an illustrated chart that Lydia might use in teaching others. They might also include a guide to “good” mushrooms and “bad” toadstools.

Ask students to find out about cystic fibrosis, the disease that claimed BJ’s life. What are the characteristics of the illness? How is it treated? What is the life span? Have students write a simple brochure called “Living with Cystic Fibrosis” that Lydia might write for other families who are dealing with the illness.

**ART**—Quilt making is an art form in the Appalachian Mountains. Gran made a Sunbonnet Sue quilt for Lydia when she was born. Ask students to design a quilt square that represents the following characters: Mama, Gran, BJ, Uncle William, Aunt Ethel Mae, Mr. Hinkle, Miss Parker, Mrs. Nowling, Dr. Smythson and Rev. John Legg. For example, BJ’s square may include a train.

**MUSIC**—The Jaw harp, fiddle, recorder, and dulcimer are musical instruments commonly used in the Appalachian Mountains. Ask students to classify these instruments. Find out the percussion instruments used by the mountain people.

**DRAMA**—Lydia’s mother is released from jail, but Miss Parker still plans a civil suit against the hospital. Think about the case, and dramatize a courtroom trial. Consider all the players: Miss Parker, a lawyer for the hospital, witnesses for both sides, and a jury.

## VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

Lydia and most of the characters in the novel speak in the Appalachian dialect. Mr. Hinkle tells Lydia that she shouldn't be ashamed of her heritage, but that she needs to learn Standard English too. Ask students to pick a passage of dialogue between Lydia and another character. Rewrite the dialogue in Standard English. How does it change the flavor of the novel?

### RELATED NOVELS

*All the Way Home*

Patricia Reilly Giff

PB: 978-0-440-41182-6

*Faith, Hope and Ivy June*

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

PB: 978-0-375-84491-1

*Road to Tater Hill*

Edith M. Hemingway

PB: 978-0-375-84544-4

### INTERNET RESOURCES

**KidsHealth: Cystic Fibrosis**

[kidshealth.org/parent/medical/lungs/cf.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/lungs/cf.html)

**Pictures and Photos of West Virginia**

[www.wvpostcards.com/company-stores/](http://www.wvpostcards.com/company-stores/)

**United Mine Workers of America.**

[www.umwa.org](http://www.umwa.org)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MARILYN SUE SHANK** earned her Ph.D. in special education from University of Kansas, where she majored in learning disabilities and behavior disorders and minored in counseling psychology and families with disabilities. She has taught general and special education at the elementary, secondary, and college levels. She lives in West Virginia with her three rescued dogs. This is her first work of fiction.

For more information about the author, visit [MarilynSueShank.com](http://MarilynSueShank.com).