

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Henry Reed, Inc.

by

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Book Information

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Book Level: 5.5

Interest Level: MG

Fourteen-year-old Henry Reed and his friend Midge Glass turn Grover's Corner, New Jersey, upside down when they open a research business.

Award: State Award

Topics: Careers, Entrepreneur; Humor/Funny, Funny; Mysteries, Misc./Other

Main Characters

Agony a lost beagle that Henry adopts

Franklin Reed Hank's father, who is a United States diplomat in Naples, Italy

Henry Harris Reed (Hank) the principal character of the story; a fourteen-year-old boy who visits his aunt and uncle for the summer and begins his own business

Jane Reed Hank's mother, whom Hank resembles in looks and interests

Jedidiah Midge's male pet rabbit; Henry and Midge unsuccessfully try to capture him

Margaret Glass (Midge) a precocious twelve-year-old girl who becomes Hank's partner in his summer business

Mathilda Midge's female pet rabbit

Miss Prescott Hank's history and government teacher in Naples, Italy

Mr. and Mrs. Apple Uncle Al and Aunt Mabel's disagreeable neighbors

Mr. Marble a welldriller who tells Hank and Midge about dousers

Mr. Zinser a man interested in the history of New Jersey colonial potteries

Seigfried Mr. and Mrs. Apple's ornery white cat

Uncle Al and Aunt Mabel Harris Jane Reed's brother and sister-in-law, who live in New Jersey; Hank stays with them during the summer

Vocabulary

apoplexy a loss of bodily function caused by a ruptured blood vessel; a stroke

diplomat a person appointed to represent his or her government in a foreign country

free enterprise the right of private businesses to compete without government interference

harrowing extremely upsetting

maimed disfigured or disabled

Synopsis

Henry Harris Reed is the fourteen-year-old son of an American diplomat stationed in Naples, Italy. He has flown back to the United States to spend the summer with his mother's brother, Uncle Al, and Aunt Mabel in Grover's Corner, New Jersey, a tiny community located in a rural area near Princeton. *Henry Reed, Inc.* is written as a journal that Henry keeps to document a school project on free enterprise.

Soon after Henry's aunt and uncle meet Henry at the Princeton train station, Henry mentions that he has pets and wants to be a naturalist. Uncle Al, who calls Henry Hank, remarks that Hank not only looks like his mother but shares her interests as well. Uncle Al remembers the commotion Hank's mother caused with her pets while they were growing up, and he chuckles as if he is preparing himself for an interesting summer. Uncle Al's hunch begins to be confirmed on the way home, as the three become caretakers of a lost beagle. Hank names the beagle Agony because of its loud, mournful barking.

The next day, Uncle Al shows Hank around Grover's Corner. The lot that belongs to Hank's mother still has a barn from its original homestead. Hank finds that the barn is filled with remnants of his mother's childhood, such as beekeeping equipment and the descendants of the pigeons that she raised. Uncle Al also tells Hank about the history of the area and explains the important role that nearby Princeton University plays in research. The conversation inspires Hank to make research the subject of his

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project on free enterprise, and he decides to start a business in the barn.

While Hank is painting a sign on the barn to advertise his new research business, Midge Glass, a precocious twelve-year-old girl, appears. She has learned a lot about research from her father, a chemist, so she persuades Hank to accept her as a partner in his firm. She says she has two rabbits to contribute to the enterprise, though one has escaped and must be caught. Hank says she will become an official partner and have her name added to the sign only when she has given him both rabbits.

Midge gives Hank a cage and one of her rabbits, named Matilda; then she and Hank attempt to catch the other rabbit, Jedidiah, with a butterfly net. Jedidiah flees to Mr. and Mrs. Apple's yard, where he knows he is safe. Midge explains that the Apples are very unfriendly and that they allow no one on their property. In frustration, Hank decides to let Agony chase the rabbit to Hank's waiting net, but the dog pursues the Apples' cat Siegfried instead. When Hank mistakenly catches Siegfried, the Apples call the police, claiming a thief stole their cat. The children have already freed the cat by the time the police officer arrives.

This episode sets the stage for a number of confrontations between Hank and Mr. Apple throughout the summer. For example, Mr. Apple objects to Hank's business being located in a residential area. Uncle Al suggests that Hank point out that his firm falls within the definition of an agricultural business, which makes it legal.

Hank's business picks up when he plows the garden one day and uncovers earthworms, which he sells to a local fisherman. When they retrieve a discarded bathtub from a neighboring farm to use as an earthworm container, Midge and Hank cause a traffic jam that is reported in a Princeton newspaper. The article gives the firm free advertising and business improves.

Midge and Hank's curiosity is aroused by the

construction of a new house. They watch the workers on the site, and they learn about dousing from the welldriller. The two children decide to drill for water on Hank's mother's lot but discover oil instead. Although the oil is actually fuel oil from a buried tank, Midge and Hank make a substantial amount of money by selling the oil to Midge's father.

After thirty-two failed attempts to catch Jedidiah, Hank and Midge finally succeed. Jedidiah thrashes so wildly, though, that the children shove the rabbit into a mailbox until they can retrieve its pen. However, the mailman comes before Hank and Midge can return, and Jedidiah bolts for freedom as soon as the mailbox door is opened.

The same afternoon, Hank collects a wasp nest by using his mother's beekeeping equipment. He places the nest into a tin can that is later knocked over by a careless plumber working on the new house. The construction workers are stung and, in the midst of the panic, a worker drives a bulldozer into a power pole, creating a power outage in Grover's Corner for several hours.

In early August, Hank becomes interested in truffle hunting, hoping to locate the rare and expensive mushroom-like delicacy by training Agony to smell truffles and uncover them. Instead, Agony uncovers an earthenware pot. A man who stops to buy worms spots the pot and claims that Hank has discovered the site of a colonial pottery that he has been seeking. The man promises to give Hank and Agony full credit for the find in the article he will write for the historical society.

When Hank learns that Mr. Glass's laboratory has an unneeded cylinder of hydrogen gas, Hank is determined to find a use for the gas. He decides to research space by filling a large plastic bag with the gas. Although Hank carefully plans the experiment, which involves a homing pigeon, unexpected events arise. While filling the balloon, Hank and Midge notice that the neighbor's sheep have escaped from their pasture. To keep the sheep safe until the farmer returns, Hank locks the sheep in an enclosure that Mr. Apple has built in his backyard.

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After inflating the balloon and placing the pigeon in a basket attached to the balloon, Hank and Midge leave to get their cameras. When they return, they find Siegfried in the basket with the dead pigeon in his mouth. Midge is so angry that she releases the balloon just as Agony jumps into the basket after Siegfried. Siegfried escapes by jumping onto the Apples' roof when the balloon passes over it. Agony is later rescued when another farmer shoots the balloon.

When Mr. Apple returns home with a man from the city, Mr. Apple finds the fire department retrieving Siegfried from the Apples' roof. Mr. Apple is grateful for Siegfried's rescue, but he is devastated when he finds that the sheep have eaten the grass in the enclosure. He has secretly been trying to develop in the pen a special type of grass that does not require much mowing. The man from the city, a seed company representative who has come to examine the grass, tries to calm Mr. Apple by saying that the grass's hardiness will be proven if the grass grows back.

The day before Hank returns to Italy, he sees Midge painting over his name on the barn. When Hank questions her, Midge explains that it is time for her name to be added to the barn wall. Because Jedidiah is still loose, Hank protests that Midge has not met the original agreement. Midge takes Hank to Mathilda's box and shows Hank eight baby rabbits. Hank agrees to add Midge's name.

Hank is glad that Midge will take care of the business and that Uncle Al and Aunt Mabel will take care of Agony until Hank returns the following summer. While Hank is on the plane to Europe, he wonders why Uncle Al predicts that Mount Vesuvius will erupt when Hank and his mother are both in Naples.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Uncle Al says Hank's mother was called the "Turmoil Kid" and proceeds to relate an incident about Hank's mother. When he finishes the story, Hank asks, "Is that all of it?" Uncle Al says, "That's all that happened" and gives a shiver. Why does Uncle Al shiver?

There are a few possibilities. One is that Uncle Al is not telling Hank the whole story and shivers when Hank pries further. The most likely reason for his shivering, however, is that Hank acts as if the story is not out of the ordinary. Uncle Al probably shivers because he realizes that since Hank thinks nothing of this incident, the summer will likely be filled with similar situations involving Hank.

Literary Analysis

Why are the animals' roles in this story important?

The antics of the animals set up many of the situations in which the children find themselves. For example, since Siegfried the cat is as ornery as his owners, Hank and Midge's encounters with Siegfried initiate their confrontations with Mr. and Mrs. Apple. The animals also create conflicts between the human characters. The elusive Jedidiah is a problem for Midge, since she needs to capture him to become a full partner in Hank's business. Agony's digging is problematic to the Apples, but his intelligence is endearing to Hank.

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Inferential Comprehension

Midge stresses the value of teamwork in any good enterprise. How does teamwork pay off for Hank and Midge?

There are many examples of teamwork in the story. Hank and Midge have different strengths that complement one another. This is vividly illustrated by the box turtles episode. Midge realizes that the turtles can be sold if they are marketed correctly and priced differently. Hank, on the other hand, has the artistic ability to make the turtles attractive. By working together Hank and Midge are able to sell all of the turtles. Midge has a gift for dousing, but Hank knows how to set up well-drilling equipment. In general, Hank and Midge are able to help each other with problems and solutions.

Constructing Meaning

Hank has the challenge of filling his time away from home with something interesting. At the time of this story, there were few structured activities for children other than going away to camp. There were also no video games, home computers, VCRs, and far fewer television networks and broadcasting hours. If you had the whole summer to fill without using modern conveniences and forms of entertainment, what projects or jobs would you try?

Answers will vary. Some students might enjoy the lack of structure. They might choose to sleep late and have very little plans for using their time. Others might wish to explore new activities, like rock climbing, building a tree house, or sightseeing. Still others might wish to reacquaint themselves with activities that technology has replaced in their lives: biking, swimming, fishing, reading, etc. In addition, some students might choose to earn money during the summer by babysitting, petsitting, or delivering newspapers.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Hank sells earthworms for twenty-five cents a dozen, rabbits for seventy-five cents each, pigeons for a dollar a pair, fuel oil for fifteen cents a gallon, and turtles

for sixty- to seventy-five cents each. Have the students find out how much these items cost today. Then have students calculate how much profit they would earn if they sold them today.

Recognizing Setting Suppose Midge were asked to travel to Naples, Italy, the next summer to visit Hank and his parents. Midge would like to know a lot about the city and surrounding area before she got there. Have the students design a travel brochure that describes various points of interest, historical facts, and things to eat and do in Naples.

Recognizing Details The setting of the story plays a significant role in the relationships among the characters. Assign students to make a map of Grover's Corner using the descriptions in the story. Students should show the relationship of the various houses on the road and some of the details of the families' backyards. The students may wish to label the buildings and places where particular events take place. The maps can be displayed in the classroom.

Understanding the Author's Craft Mr. and Mrs. Apple's lives change considerably the summer Hank stays with Uncle Al and Aunt Mabel. Have the students choose a day from Hank's journal and write about that day from Mr. or Mrs. Apple's point of view. The students may wish to share their journal entries with the class by reading them aloud.