

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Hitty: Her First Hundred Years

by

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Book Information

Rachel Field, Hitty: Her First Hundred Years

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Book Level: 7.1

Interest Level: MG

Hitty is a doll of great charm and real character whose memoirs are full of her thrilling adventures on land and sea.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Adventure, Travel

Main Characters

Adelina Patti the talented singer whom Clarissa sneaks out to see in concert; her fans almost trample Clarissa after the concert

Andy the young boy who works for the Prebles; he saves Hitty for Phoebe on more than one occasion

Bill Buckle a sailor on Captain Preble's ship who helps the family survive being shipwrecked by telling them how to deal with the local natives

Captain Dan'l Preble Phoebe's father, who captains a whaling ship and tries to keep the family's spirits up when the ship is lost; he loves to spoil Phoebe

Car'line the little girl who is given Hitty by her brother Cooky after he fishes Hitty out of the river; Miss Hope takes Hitty from her when she realizes that Hitty is the doll stolen from the Exposition

Carrie the stable man's married daughter; Hitty is sent to her by her sister after Hitty is found in one of the rental carriages; she later sells Hitty in a second-hand shop

Clarissa Pryce the little girl who rescues Hitty from the sofa; Clarissa takes Hitty to a concert, insists on having Hitty's daguerreotype taken, and shows Hitty to John Greenleaf Whittier

Great-Aunt Louella the grouchy old woman who receives Hitty as a gift from her niece after Hitty is turned into a pincushion

Hitty (Mehitabel) the refined but simple little wooden doll who describes her adventures as she passes from owner to owner in her first one hundred years

Isabella Van Rensselaer the spoiled little girl who insists on having Hitty after she finds Hitty in Miss Pinch's room; Isabella loses Hitty while being attacked by a gang of boys on New Year's Eve

Katie the poor sickly child who is given Hitty by one of Isabella's attackers; she loses Hitty in the hay during a hayride

Little Thankful the spoiled daughter of two missionaries in India; she is sent to live with her grandparents in Philadelphia after she suffers a serious illness; she stuffs Hitty in a sofa at a party because she is ashamed of her

Miss Annette and Miss Hortense Larraby the two old maids who borrow Hitty and dress her in an heirloom wedding handkerchief so that she can be exhibited in the Cotton Exposition

Miss Hope the wealthy woman who is responsible for Hitty being returned to the organizers of the Cotton Exposition

Miss Hunter the antique dealer who greatly values Hitty; her habit of setting Hitty on a desk at night to keep her from being damaged enables Hitty to write her memoirs

Miss Milly Pinch the talented seamstress who finds Hitty in the Van Rensselaer's attic and uses her as a model for her sewing; she is outraged when Isabella claims Hitty

Miss Pamela Wellington the doll collector who is given Hitty by Great-Aunt Louella; she treasures Hitty but loses her when Hitty is blown out of a car

Mr. Farley the artist who takes Hitty after she is found in the barn and uses her as a model for his paintings; he lends Hitty to Miss Hortense and Miss Annette

Mrs. Kate Preble Phoebe's pious mother, who agrees to be the cook on her husband's whaling ship

Old Gentleman the genteel old man who pays an extravagant price for Hitty at an auction because he thinks she is a rare bit of early Americana; he works for Miss Hunter

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Old Peddler the old wandering salesman who carves Hitty out of mountain-ash wood for Phoebe

Patch the disgruntled first mate of Captain Preble, who argues which direction should be taken when the "Diana-Kate" is sinking

Paul Schneider the little boy who invites Clarissa to join him at the Adelina Patti concert; his Uncle Hans is a musician there

Phoebe Preble the spunky little girl for whom Hitty is originally made; Phoebe cherishes Hitty but repeatedly loses her

Ruth Pryce Clarissa's older sister, who longs to see Adelina Patti's concert

Sally Loomis the impetuous daughter of a steamboat captain, who steals Hitty out of the display case at the Cotton Exposition; after attending a church service she is afraid a thunderstorm has been sent to punish her, so she throws Hitty into the river

the Hindoo the snakecharmer who finds Hitty after Phoebe drops her in India; he uses Hitty in his performances until Little Thankful's father buys her from him

the old lady the elderly woman who buys Hitty from Carrie and displays Hitty with her china animals; when she leaves without returning, all her belongings are auctioned

Vocabulary

chemise a woman's undergarment

compunctions feelings of guilt

gaudy tastelessly bright or colorful; overly decorated

lavish to give generously

resplendent beautiful, shining, glorious

vestige a trace or sign left by something

Synopsis

The story opens with a doll named Hitty sitting in an antique shop writing her memoirs. She begins her life story with a flashback to a hundred years earlier when the Old Peddler carves her out of mountain-ash wood for Phoebe Preble, the young daughter of a sea captain. Only a day after Hitty is

completed, Phoebe sneaks her into church and accidentally drops her there. After a week of sharing the empty church with some bats, Hitty is retrieved and returned to Phoebe. Later that summer, Phoebe loses Hitty again while she and the hired boy Andy are picking raspberries and become frightened by some Passamaquoddie Indian women who are also picking berries. Hitty is then carried off by a crow whose nest is in a tree on the Prebles' land. Hitty gets out of the nest, but she falls and gets caught in the branches. Andy finally spots her in the tree, and Captain Preble helps Andy save her.

Soon afterward Captain Preble takes his family to Boston. Difficulty outfitting his ship and finding qualified crew members prompts the Captain to persuade his wife to be the ship's cook. Mrs. Preble agrees to the job but only after the captain gives the boat a Christian name. Phoebe and Hitty find the lengthy ocean voyage exciting, but the fun ends when the ship, filled with whale oil, catches fire. Patch, the first mate, argues with Captain Preble about the navigation of the boat and the best possible place to be rescued. Patch and many other crew members take most of the smaller boats and leave in the direction Patch suggests. Captain Preble, his family, and a few loyal crew members fill the remaining boats. Hitty is left on board when Phoebe is whisked off the ship.

Fortunately, as the ship burns, it pitches sideways and Hitty gets thrown into the water. She eventually drifts to the same island where Phoebe's boat has landed. When a group of local natives also lands on the island, they demand Phoebe give them Hitty because they think Hitty is an idol to be worshipped. After many weeks, the castaways see a ship, and Andy steals Hitty back for Phoebe before they all escape to the boats. The castaways race after the ship and are noticed and rescued after burning their clothing as flares. The ship takes the castaways to India, where Captain Preble takes his family shopping to replace their belongings. When Phoebe gets tired, sailor Bill Buckle carries her back to the ship. He does not notice that the sleeping Phoebe drops Hitty.

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Hitty lies in the gutter until a snakecharmer picks her up. The snakecharmer uses Hitty in his act until a missionary purchases Hitty for his daughter, Little Thankful. After Thankful survives a serious illness, her parents send her to her grandparents in Philadelphia. Soon after arriving, Thankful is invited to a birthday party. There, the girls mock Hitty, and Thankful hides Hitty in a sofa. The sofa is moved into the attic, and it is not until several years later that some children are playing on the sofa and one of them finds Hitty. Hitty becomes the doll of Clarissa Pryce, a ten-year-old Quaker girl.

One night a friend of Clarissa's, Paul Schneider, offers her the chance to see the famous singer, Adelina Patti. Clarissa sneaks out with Hitty to the concert, but after the performance, Clarissa and Hitty are nearly trampled by the rowdy audience. Later, a famous artist comes to take Clarissa's daguerreotype, and Clarissa wants Hitty included. Clarissa is disappointed when Hitty is cut out of the shots, so the artist takes a picture of Hitty by herself. Hitty is also honored when John Greenleaf Whittier writes her a poem. When Clarissa is sent to boarding school, Hitty is packed away.

Hitty's storage box is to be sent to cousins of the Pryces in New York City along with some furniture. However, a delivery man makes a mistake, and the box comes to the attic of the Van Rensselaer family in Washington Square in New York City. Seamstress Miss Milly Pinch discovers Hitty and makes doll clothing for her to prove her sewing skills to Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's eight-year-old daughter Isabella sees Hitty and takes her from Miss Pinch's room. Miss Pinch demands the doll back, but Isabella refuses. Mr. Van Rensselaer solves the problem by giving Miss Pinch a recommendation for a better job in exchange for allowing Isabella to keep Hitty. Excitement still seems to follow Hitty, however, when on New Year's Eve Isabella resents being kept out of her parents' party. She sneaks out of the house with Hitty to visit a friend and is attacked by a band of boys who steal Hitty from her. One of the boys takes Hitty home for his cousin Katie.

Hitty is happy to be with Katie, since Katie is a delicate, pretty child who cares deeply for Hitty. When Katie gets sick, she is sent to the country, where she takes Hitty on a hayride and loses Hitty in the hay. Hitty is shoveled into the back of the barn. It is many years later that Hitty is discovered and given to a traveling artist named Mr. Farley. Mr. Farley uses Hitty in his portraits. He takes Hitty to New Orleans, where his spinster landladies, Miss Annette and Miss Hortense, borrow Hitty for the Cotton Exposition. The women use an heirloom wedding handkerchief to make Hitty a new dress.

At the Exposition, Hitty attracts the attention of a young girl, Sally Loomis, who steals her from the showcase. When a storm strikes just after Sally attends church, fear drives Sally to throw Hitty and her wicker case into the river. A boy fishes Hitty out and gives her to his sister, Car'line. Car'line loves Hitty and takes her to a Christmas party, where one of the hostesses, Miss Hope, recognizes the doll as the one stolen from the Exposition. In an attempt to return Hitty to her owner, the Exposition organizers send Hitty to a defunct address for Mr. Farley, and Hitty ends up in the dead letter office until a postman takes her. He leaves her in a store, and eventually Hitty is made into a pincushion and sold at a church fair.

At the fair, Hitty is bought by a woman who gives her to her Great-Aunt Louella as a present. The gift is not appreciated, so Miss Louella gives Hitty to Pamela Wellington, a doll collector who admires her. Hitty remains with Miss Pamela until Miss Pamela accidentally lets Hitty fly out of a speeding car. Hitty is found by picnickers who leave her in a rented carriage. When the carriage is returned, the stable man's daughter finds Hitty and sends her to her sister Carrie, who runs a junk shop. An old lady who collects small china animals and lives in the old Preble house purchases Hitty. Hitty sits on a shelf until the old lady disappears and her things are sold at auction.

At the auction Hitty is greatly admired. During the bidding Hitty's price rises swiftly, but the bidding war culminates in a battle between an obnoxious woman

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and a kindly Old Gentleman. When the woman leaves, assuming she has won the bidding on the doll, the Old Gentleman bids one more time. He takes Hitty to Miss Hunter's antique store, where she writes her memoirs at night.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Hitty feel about Isabella Van Rensselaer?

Hitty seems to have mixed feelings about Isabella. On the one hand, Hitty likes that Isabella admires her. Hitty also thinks that Isabella is very pretty, and Hitty appreciates that Isabella plays with her and takes her places. Hitty particularly likes that Isabella causes her to be picked up by Charles Dickens. On the other hand, Hitty thinks that the way Isabella got her was underhanded. Hitty hints that Isabella is deceptive, and she notes that Isabella has a bad temper. Hitty also is disgusted that Isabella's disobedience causes Hitty to be stolen, though Hitty does admire Isabella's spunkiness when she is being harassed by the boys.

Literary Analysis

Describe Hitty's home in the antique shop.

Hitty is kept in the store window of a New York antique shop during the day, where she has her own little bench, a rug, and a bed. From the window she can watch the people passing and stopping to admire her. At night Hitty is moved to the store's office to sit on the owner's untidy desk. It is here that Hitty can reach a quill pen and paper with which to write her memoirs.

Inferential Comprehension

How is Hitty different at the end of her first one hundred years from what she was when she belonged to Phoebe? How is Hitty the same?

Hitty goes through many changes in this story. By the end she has had many owners and many adventures. She also has lost most of her paint, but her monetary value has greatly increased. Her outer garments have changed many times. However, she still has all the same body parts; she still wears the same chemise with her cross-stitched name that she started with; she still has a great fondness for Phoebe; and Hitty still has a pleasant expression and pays a great deal of attention to the world around her. Hitty also maintains a rather conservative and prim view on life throughout the story.

Constructing Meaning

What clues does the reader have that Hitty will eventually be permanently separated from Phoebe?

In the first place, the story begins with Hitty in an antique shop remembering Phoebe. Besides this, Phoebe has real difficulty keeping track of Hitty. First she leaves Hitty at church. Next, she leaves Hitty in the raspberry patch, and Hitty is carried off by crows. Then she leaves Hitty on the "Diana-Kate" when the boat is burning. Finally, Hitty is taken away by the natives. Each of these times Hitty is returned to or reunited with Phoebe, but when Phoebe drops Hitty in India, the two are separated forever.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Hitty lives through many different time periods. Have the students choose two of these time periods and write what they notice is different about the two eras and what has stayed the same. Have the students use details from the book to support their answer.

Extending Meaning Hitty has many different owners, and each owner's time with Hitty is unique. Have the students make posters showing the owners they feel are most significant. Have the students draw or use magazine pictures to

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depict the character, and have the students note what they feel is most important about the time that Hitty spends with each character.

Recognizing Feelings Hitty's owners have a wide variety of reactions to Hitty. Have the students choose one of Hitty's owners and write what they think that owner would say about Hitty. Have the student use details from the book to support their ideas.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Hitty remembers fondly that John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a poem to her, but she claims it is not included in any of his published works. Have the students read a few poems by John Greenleaf Whittier and then try to complete the poem that Hitty partially remembers.