

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Journey to the Center of the Earth (Unabridged)

by
Jules Verne

Book Information

Jules Verne, Journey to the Center of the Earth (Unabridged)

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Book Level: 9.9

Interest Level: UG

A team of explorers makes an expedition into a crater in Iceland, which leads to the center of the earth and to incredible and horrifying discoveries.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Adventure, Survival; Classics, Classics (All); Popular Groupings, College Bound; Science Fiction, Misc./Other

Main Characters

Gretchen first cousin to Harry as well as his betrothed

Hans Bjelke strong and silent Icelandic guide who accompanies the Professor and Harry on their journey

Harry (Henry) Lawson the Professor's intelligent and doubtful nephew who deciphers the message

Professor Hardwigg learned and stubborn uncle who finds the parchment that leads to the journey

Vocabulary

abnegation voluntary surrender of something desired

amelioration make or grow better

gesticulation to make gestures in an animated manner

quixotic idealistic to an impractical degree

repast portion of food taken at one time to satisfy appetite

tempest violent storm

Synopsis

While examining an old book, Professor Hardwigg discovers an ancient piece of parchment when it

falls from within the pages. After much frustration, the Professor's nephew, Harry, deciphers the message written by Arne Saknussemm. It reveals that the craters of Yocul of Sneffels will lead the traveler into the center of the earth. Immediately, the Professor begins making plans for him and Harry to go to Iceland. Harry is quite reserved, but he agrees to accompany his uncle.

In Iceland, they are afforded a guide by the name of Hans Bjelke, who agrees to accompany them so long as he is paid his salary every Saturday. He is a calm, collected, and very able man. He speaks very little, usually only a word or two. They soon reach Mount Sneffels, but cannot directly descend into its crater. A shadow of Scartaris will be cast by the sun on the direct entryway, but it has been cloudy for several days. Harry hopes it will remain cloudy so the time frame for entering will have passed. The sun does shine, however, and they are able to begin the journey.

Once inside the crater, they find more Runic symbols left by Saknussemm. With their rations and electric lights, they manage to get around quite well, but Harry often thinks of how much he misses his home in Germany. Going ever deeper, they discover caverns and coal mines. One serious problem is mounting: they can find no water supply. When they come to a gallery with several passages, the Professor chooses the wrong road, which leads them nowhere, and wastes precious time to find water. Eventually, they hear water running and Hans is able to break through granite in order to get to it.

Later, Harry is separated from his group, and he is not found until several days later. After more traveling, they find themselves on a subterranean beach facing the Central Sea. Hans builds a makeshift raft and they attempt to cross it. Along the way they encounter huge prehistoric sea creatures, and an antediluvian giant man herding mastodons. The Professor discovers a human skull, Harry finds a dagger, and soon they come upon Saknussemm's initials. They then realize they are headed in the right direction, except that a granite wall blocks their passage. With gunpowder, they break through the

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wall and are soon inside, but they have lost their supplies.

Inside the earth once again, Harry is beaten and battered and has terrifying dreams of being chased by Ape Gigans. Soon, hunger becomes an overwhelming concern, and it appears there is no solution as they find themselves inside an active volcano. A huge eruption soon sends them out, and they find themselves alive and well on a small Mediterranean island.

Hans takes his final pay and parts ways with Harry and the Professor, who return to Germany where they tell their story to all who will listen.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How did Harry feel about his uncle?

He cared for him a great deal. It was only out of concern for his uncle's health that he withheld the fact that he had deciphered the message. Yet, there were also times when he thought he was a madman. He also resented the fact that his uncle did not seem to heed his advice or concerns, but shrugged them off instead. He appreciated his uncle's determination and care.

Literary Analysis

Who is the antagonist in this book?

The answer would probably be nature itself or the elements. The Professor is often seen challenging nature, intent to beat it. They must defeat not just the strange and powerful creatures, but also the elements themselves, such as temperature, storms, and lightning. There is also the lack of water to contend with.

Inferential Comprehension

How were the subterranean plants discovered by the Professor and his companions different from the plants of today?

They lacked the bright colors of modern plants. They were all one tint and had a brown and faded look due to the lack of sun. The flowers also lacked color and fragrance. They were described as looking like aged paper.

Constructing Meaning

What does water seem to represent in this story?

Literally, it is a means of survival and the essence of life, but it also serves as a guide for the weary travelers, helping them find their way. It represents hope and determination. When Harry drinks water, he is not only nourished, but he is encouraged as well.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Harry gave very detailed descriptions of Iceland in his narratives. He described the volcanic land forms, the customs, and the people. During the book's time in the 1800s, he mentioned there was a population of 70,000. For a project, have students study modern Iceland, including Reykjavik and the towns mentioned in the book. How has Iceland changed since Verne's story? What is the current population? Encourage students to find pictures of Mount Sneffels and even video documentaries to show in class.

Comparing and Contrasting The parchment the Professor found was written in ancient Runic symbols. It was difficult to translate, but he and Harry finally did it. Today, we know how to translate the Runic alphabet, but we did not always. It is similar to the Egyptian hieroglyphs. It was not until one of Napoleon's officers stumbled upon the famous Rosetta Stone in 1799 that scholars could finally unlock the mysteries of the hieroglyphs. On it were written hieroglyphs, demotic, and Greek. For a project, have students research the Rosetta Stone, and also try to find

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messages in hieroglyphs and Runic symbols to share with the class.

Describing Actions or Events In this book, many prehistoric species of plant and animal are described. For a project, have students research when species first appeared on the earth. Have them learn about specific species and also see if they can find information about the ones mentioned in the book, such as Ichthyosaurus and Plesiosaurus. The first fossils appeared during the Precambrian period, and they were prokaryotes and eukaryotes. During the Cambrian period, the first vertebrates appeared. The Silurian brought the first land plants. The Devonian was the "Age of Fish," and the first reptiles appeared during the Pennsylvanian period. The Triassic brought the first mammals, and the Jurassic gave us dinosaurs. Humans finally arrived during the Neogene period of the Cenozoic.

Recognizing Detail Harry was nervous about descending into Mount Sneffels. His uncle assured him that it had been dormant since 1219. In the end, however, a volcanic eruption saves their lives. For a project, have students research some of the most famous and catastrophic eruptions of all time. Some examples are Mount Vesuvius, which destroyed Pompeii in A.D. 79. Another is Mount St. Helens in 1980. Also, the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in 1815 was the largest of the modern era, causing The Year Without a Summer. It might also be interesting for students to find which volcanoes are most likely to erupt during the next decade.