

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Meet Felicity, an American Girl

by
Valerie Tripp

Book Information

Valerie Tripp, Meet Felicity, an American Girl
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In Williamsburg in 1774, nine-year-old Felicity rescues a beautiful horse that is being beaten and starved by its cruel owner.

Topics: Animals, Horses; Community Life, Animal Rights; History, Colonial Period; Series, American Girl; Wars, American Revolutionary War

Main Characters

Ben the new apprentice in Mr. Merriman's store; Felicity uses his breeches for riding Penny

Felicity Merriman a young colonial girl and the central character of the story; she tames Penny and wants to keep her

Jiggy Nye the owner of the local tannery; he is cruel to animals and mean to Felicity

Marcus a man who helps Mr. Merriman at the store and at home

Mr. Merriman (Father) Felicity's father; he owns a general store

Mrs. Fitchett a customer at Mr. Merriman's store; she announces that Jiggy Nye has a new horse

Mrs. Merriman (Mother) Felicity's mother; she says Felicity has no patience for sewing and writing

Nan Merriman Felicity's younger sister

Penny Jiggy Nye's beautiful horse; she is tamed by Felicity

William Merriman Felicity's younger brother

Vocabulary

apprentice one who learns a trade or skill by working for an experienced expert

breeches a pair of boy's short pants

chit a disrespectful young girl

milliner a person who makes and sells women's hats

petticoats a fancy underskirt worn by women and girls

tannery a place where animal hides are made into leather

Synopsis

Felicity Merriman is a young girl in colonial Williamsburg who would rather visit her father's general store than do her sewing at home. Her parents think she is impatient and needs to learn to take time to do her chores and her school work more carefully. While in the store one day near the end of summer, a customer says that Jiggy Nye, the cruel owner of the tannery, has acquired a new horse. Felicity hears Mrs. Fitchett say that Jiggy will probably work this new horse to death as he has his other animals. Felicity offers to help Ben, her father's new apprentice, make a delivery to Jiggy's business so that she can see the horse. When they arrive at Jiggy's tannery, the beautiful but ill-groomed horse is rearing and whinnying as Jiggy yells threats at the horse and pulls on a rope around the horse's neck. When Jiggy refuses to pay for the delivery, Felicity and Ben leave the tannery. Felicity decides to call the horse Penny because of its copper color and independent spirit.

After staying indoors during three days of rain, Felicity, her sister Nan, and her brother William are permitted to deliver some preserves to a lady in town. After making the delivery, Felicity takes her siblings to see Penny. When Jiggy notices them by the fence, he tells Felicity that the horse is not her business. After Penny rears and breaks the rope that ties her, Felicity hears Jiggy yell out to the horse that anyone who can ride her can have her.

Just before dawn the following morning, Felicity sneaks outside and runs to Jiggy's to see Penny, who is again tied to a stake. Felicity whispers softly to the horse and gives her an apple before running home. At breakfast, Mrs. Merriman notices how wet and muddy Felicity is. For a month, Felicity sneaks out early every morning to see Penny, wearing

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Ben's breeches borrowed from the mending pile so her mother will not know she has been outside. Each day she brings Penny a treat and sits patiently while Penny gets to know and trust her. After several weeks, Penny lets Felicity ride her. When Ben discovers that Felicity is the one who has his missing breeches, she confesses that she has been riding Penny. She tells Ben that since she can ride the horse, it will be hers. Ben does not believe that Jiggy meant what he said but promises to keep Felicity's secret.

A week later, Felicity rides Penny right out of Jiggy's pasture to her house. Her family is astonished to learn she has been going to see the horse daily for five weeks. While Mr. Merriman is explaining to Felicity that they cannot keep the horse because she belongs to Jiggy, Jiggy himself comes into the yard, accusing Felicity of stealing his horse. Felicity explains that he said anyone who could ride her could have her, but Jiggy denies it. He announces he will never even sell the horse to the Merrimans. Heartbroken, Felicity determines to save Penny before Jiggy kills her.

That night, Felicity once again leaves the house to see Penny. Felicity rides her fast across the pasture. As Penny leaps over the fence, Felicity slides off her back and then tells Penny to go into the woods. As Penny disappears, Felicity whispers good-bye. She returns home and tells Ben what she has done. Ben assures her that Penny knows that Felicity loves her. Felicity is content knowing that Penny has her independence.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does Penny act calm with Felicity but wild with Jiggy?

Felicity always speaks softly and calmly to Penny. She also brings Penny good things to eat. These things help Penny realize that Felicity will not hurt her or be a threat to her. When Jiggy is with Penny, however, he yells and beats the horse. Penny learns to fear Jiggy and behaves wildly in an effort to protect herself or to escape.

Literary Analysis

After Penny jumps the fence, why does Felicity want her to run off and disappear into the woods?

Felicity wants to keep Penny for herself, but she realizes that Penny belongs to cruel Jiggy Nye. Felicity knows that Penny can have her freedom and independence by escaping into the woods. Since Felicity cannot keep Penny, she wants Penny to have a much happier life free from Jiggy.

Inferential Comprehension

In what way is Felicity similar to Penny?

Felicity is too impatient to sit quietly working on her sewing and writing. She much prefers doing things independently. Felicity also feels that her clothing restricts her freedom; wearing breeches allows her legs to be free to straddle horses, jump fences, and run fast. In much the same way, Penny's life is restricted. Jiggy keeps her tied to a stake in the ground in a pasture, restricting her movement.

Constructing Meaning

When Mrs. Merriman is helping Felicity learn stitching, she says, "Remember, haste makes waste." What does this mean?

Felicity has just finished sewing the hem on her apron, but she has not sewn it carefully. Felicity is always in a hurry to get her sewing done and does not take the time to make her stitches correctly the first time. Mrs. Merriman has to rip out the stitches, and Felicity has to sew them again. Thus, Felicity has wasted her time in sewing so fast since she has to spend more time redoing it.

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Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting In chapter one, Felicity is in her father's store getting some ginger. The story gives a detailed description of the contents of the store. Have the students work in pairs or small groups to create a diorama of the store using a box and drawings of what might be found in a store during colonial times. They can use the description in chapter one as a reference, or they can do research to get other ideas for designing the store. The completed dioramas can be displayed around the room.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The story takes place in the town of Williamsburg in the colony of Virginia, one of the original thirteen colonies. Have the students choose a specific aspect of life in colonial Williamsburg, such as food, clothing, trade, apprenticeships, farming, etc., and write a brief report about it.

Responding to Literature When Felicity is in her father's store, Mr. Merriman gives her a piece of rock candy. The students can make their own rock candy. Have each student attach a clean metal paper clip to a piece of string. Tie the other end of the string around a pencil and rest the pencil across the top of a small jar or plastic cup so that the paper clip is suspended in the cup. Be sure the metal does not touch the bottom. Fill each cup with a solution of two parts sugar and one part hot water. The students can add food coloring or a small amount of peppermint flavoring to the sugar water. As the water evaporates, crystals will begin to form on the string. This process may take several weeks. As they observe the crystals, explain to them that rock candy was one of the few candies available to children in colonial times.

Understanding the Author's Craft This story is told by a narrator who focuses on Felicity's thoughts and feelings. Ben and Mr. and Mrs. Merriman probably have very different feelings about the events that occur in this story. Have the students choose one of these characters and retell one event from that character's perspective.