

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Trumpeter of Krakow by Eric Kelly

Book Information

Eric Kelly, The Trumpeter of Krakow
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The legend of the Trumpeter of Krakow endures as a fifteenth-century Ukrainian family maintains a vow to keep Poland free from invasion.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Countries/Regions, Poland; Power Lessons
AR, Grade 7

Main Characters

Andrew Charnetski (Pan Andrew, Andrew Kovalski)
a loyal Ukrainian farmer whose family has guarded the Great Tarnov Crystal for generations; a devoted family man who delivers the crystal to the king of Poland

Andrew Tenczynski Andrew Charnetski's cousin who was murdered because he refused to pay a merchant; his family fled Krakow in fear

Elzbietka an orphaned child who lives with her uncle, Nicholas Kreutz; she becomes Joseph's friend and confidante

Ivan the ambitious leader of the Muscovites; he wants to capture the Ukraine from Poland

Jan Kanty a respected priest and scholar in Krakow who aids the Charnetskis and others who are in need of help and protection

Johann Tring a greedy former student at the University of Krakow; he studies under Nicholas Kreutz to learn alchemy

Joseph Charnetski (Joseph Kovalski) a fifteen-year-old boy whose quick thinking saves Elzbietka and his beloved family; he learns to play the Heynal on the trumpet

King Kazimir Jagiello the peace-loving king of Poland to whom Pan Andrew delivers the Great Tarnov Crystal

Michael (the Snake) an evil man who helps Peter of the Button Face attack the church

Nicholas Kreutz a respected alchemist and the uncle of Elzbietka; he falls under the influence of an evil-minded student and the promise of power and fame

Peter of the Button Face (Stefan Ostrovski, Bogdan Grozny, Bogd) a ruthless man, also known as Bogdan the Terrible, who tries to steal the Great Tarnov Crystal from the Charnetskis; he takes orders from Ivan

Stas the deformed son of the old woman who manages the building where the Kreutzes and Charnetskis reside; he is willing to sell information for gold

the mother the devout Christian wife of Andrew and the mother of Joseph

the trumpeter a thirteenth century man who sacrificed his life to carry out a vow to God and country; he was killed with a Tartar arrow before he could complete the Heynal

Vocabulary

alchemist a scientist whose chief goal is to discover a way to change inferior metals into gold

aqueduct a channel that uses gravity to transport water from a remote source

commonwealth a state or nation governed by the people; a republic

guild an association of persons with the same occupation

Tartar a fierce Mongolian invader of Western Asia and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages

trance a dreamlike mental state, usually produced by hypnosis or drugs

Synopsis

The year is 1241. Tartars from the East invade Poland and the city of Krakow. Peasants leave their farms, seeking the protection of the strong walls of the Wawel, the castle of the king of Poland. The Tartars burn and loot the city, killing people not safe within the Wawel. Only one young man remains outside the castle: the trumpeter of the Church of Our Lady Mary. It is his duty to play the trumpet hourly from each window of the church tower, having taken an oath to play the Heynal until death.

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The trumpeter's devotion to church and country inspire him to remain in the church tower. As he plays the Heynal, a Tartar arrow kills him, and the song is broken before the last notes are played.

Time shifts to late July 1461. The Charnetski family is traveling to Krakow. Pan Andrew, his wife, and son, Joseph, barely escaped from their home in the Ukraine before invading Tartars destroyed it. A man with a buttonlike scar on one cheek and introducing himself as Stefan Ostrovski stops the family's progress. He claims to have heard of the family's plight and identifies their cart because it is drawn in the Ukrainian manner, by two horses instead of the customary one. Pan Andrew is immediately suspicious of Ostrovski; Stefan does not look Polish and his words are threatening. Ostrovski offers to buy Pan Andrew's out-of-season pumpkin for the pumpkin's weight in gold. When Pan Andrew refuses his offer, Ostrovski draws his sword to fight. Pan Andrew dislodges the stranger's sword from his hand and tosses him from the cart. Fifteen-year-old Joseph strikes Ostrovski's horse on the flank, causing it to bolt. The Charnetskis race away, leaving the stranded Ostrovski behind.

When Pan Andrew and his family arrive in Krakow, they seek Andrew's cousin, Andrew Tenczynski, only to learn that he was killed by an angry mob of merchants for failure to pay his debts. The Charnetskis are informed that Tenczynski's family has fled and that they, too, should leave to avoid a similar fate.

Homeless and nearly penniless, the Charnetskis seek food and water in the market area of Krakow. Fascinated by the sights, Joseph wanders, only to see a boy cruelly tormenting a wolf dog. When the dog moves to retaliate, the boy leaps out of its way. Joseph, realizing that a beautiful young girl and an older man are now in the path of the animal, leaps to successfully deflect the dog's attack. Since he has dealt with many dogs in the Ukraine, Joseph knows that this dog has attacked only in self-defense and minimizes his own bravery. The grateful man invites Joseph to their modest apartment on the Street of the Pigeons near the

University of Krakow so that he may clean up. There, Joseph learns that the man is Nicholas Kreutz, an alchemist and teacher at the university, and the girl is Nicholas's orphaned niece, Elzbietka. Joseph explains his family's situation. Kreutz excuses himself briefly and returns with news that the apartment below his is available for the Charnetski family.

Gleefully returning to the marketplace, Joseph finds his parents surrounded by an angry mob led by Stefan Ostrovski. Ostrovski has convinced the crowd that Pan Andrew has bewitched Ostrovski's brother, cut off his head, and changed the head into a pumpkin. Ostrovski urges the crowd to kill Charnetski and return the pumpkin to him so he may properly bury his brother's head. Jan Kanty, a highly respected priest and scholar, enters the marketplace and disperses the crowd.

After Kanty invites the family to his home, Kanty and Pan Andrew meet privately so Pan Andrew can inform him of the family's situation. Agreeing that the Charnetskis would be safer if they lived under an assumed name, Kanty also suggests they accept the apartment Joseph has located. Kanty acknowledges that Kreutz's reputation is basically good, although there are rumors about the alchemist's strange experiments. Because the Charnetskis have little money, he suggests that Pan Andrew sell his cart and horses, and he agrees to help Pan Andrew locate employment. Before leaving Kanty's home, Joseph awakens from a disturbing dream about a floating pumpkin and a Tartar with the head of a dog. He then sees his father remove a brilliant object from the pumpkin and place it in a bag. Although Joseph questions his father about the mysterious object, he is told that he will learn about the object in time.

The wolf dog approaches Joseph as he, his parents, and Kanty make their way to the Charnetskis' new home. The dog accompanies the group as they encounter a large crowd of students who have assembled to witness a duel. Kanty recognizes one of the combatants as Johann Tring, a sinister-looking young man whose interests lie in

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astrology and necromancy. Kanty disperses the crowd and chides Tring for his role in the duel. Remembering that Tring resides near Kreutz, Kanty invites the student to accompany them. The landlady, a bent old woman, admits them and escorts the Charnetskis up a rickety wooden staircase to their second-floor apartment. They learn that Kreutz and his niece reside above them and Tring lives across the courtyard.

Pan Andrew hides the bag in the apartment. Elzbietka keeps Joseph's mother company while the boy accompanies his father to the tower of the Church of Our Lady Mary, where Pan Andrew will be the night trumpeter. Joseph learns about his father's duties and is told the legend of the broken note of the Heynal. Pan Andrew expects Joseph to learn the song, in the event his father is unable to play.

Joseph is admitted to the apartment by the landlady's deformed son, Stas, who demands a coin in return for allowing Joseph to pass. Stas speaks about Kreutz's experiments in alchemy and Tring's devilish alliance with the alchemist. A week or more later, a frightened Elzbietka summons Joseph, asking him to secretly observe the experiments that Kreutz and Tring are conducting that night. She reveals her fear of Tring, explaining that her uncle's behavior has changed since he started working with the student. Joseph concurs, after observation, that Tring is using hypnotism to induce Kreutz to continue experiments in changing base metals into gold.

Elzbietka spends more time with Joseph and his family, as her uncle continues to shut himself away with Tring. The two teens become friends, and Joseph teases the young girl that he will play the complete Heynal as a signal if he is ever in danger. Taking him seriously, Elzbietka promises to run to Jan Kanty if she hears the signal.

Near the university, Stas points out Joseph to Ostrovski, who is in reality Peter of the Button Face, a criminal employed by the Muscovite, Ivan. Ostrovski rewards Stas with a coin for the information and acknowledges that he is also known

as Bogdan Grozny and Bogdan the Terrible. Peter and his men search Pan Andrew's apartment for the pumpkin's contents, while Pan Andrew and Joseph are working in the church tower that night. Although Kreutz hears the intruders and frightens them away with his phosphorescent disguise and chemical display, Peter manages to escape to the East, presumably with the coveted object.

Strangely, several months later, a depressed Peter returns to continue his quest for the mysterious object. Employing the evil Michael, also known as the Snake, Peter attacks the church and holds Joseph and Pan Andrew hostage. Joseph learns that the mysterious object is the Great Tarnov Crystal. Pan Andrew, knowing the crystal disappeared the night Peter and his men searched the apartment, has assumed that Peter has the crystal. Peter denies knowledge of the crystal's whereabouts and decides to take Joseph to the Charnetski apartment to search, leaving Michael behind to guard Pan Andrew. Before they leave, however, Peter instructs Joseph to play the Heynal to maintain normal appearances. Joseph, who recalls teasing Elzbietka about using the Heynal as a danger signal, plays the entire song. Peter notices no difference in the song and leaves for the apartment with Joseph.

Elzbietka is in the Charnetski apartment when she hears Joseph's song. She has been spending most of her time with Joseph's mother because her uncle's health and behavior have deteriorated as Tring's trances continue. Recognizing Joseph's signal, Elzbietka races to Jan Kanty to report her concern. Kanty summons help from the night watchman, whose movements frighten Peter away. Pan Andrew is released, still wondering who has the crystal.

Several weeks after the attack on the church, Tring and Kreutz are working in the loft when Kreutz reveals the crystal, a precious gem reputed to reveal truths and powerful secrets to those who gaze into it. Tring encourages Kreutz to enter a trance by staring at the crystal. In the gem the alchemist views a room containing a parchment on which is written

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the formula for converting base metals into gold. Following the directions on the parchment, Kreutz concocts a dangerous combination of chemicals, causing an explosion and resulting fire that destroys the building. Tring flees quickly and Kreutz follows, hiding the crystal under his black gown. Joseph, his mother, and Elzbietka escape the burning building and flee to the church tower to assure Pan Andrew of their safety. On their way, Joseph sees Peter in the custody of the king's guard.

Pan Andrew joins the efforts to fight the spreading fire. When he returns to the church, he reports that the fire has been extinguished after destroying nearly one-third of the city of Krakow. Kanty appears, bringing with him a disoriented Kreutz, who reveals to Pan Andrew that he has the crystal. The four men meet with the king, where Pan Andrew gives the crystal to the king and tells the ruler about the sacrifices his family has made through the years to keep the crystal safe. According to the oath sworn by the Charnetski family, the crystal is to be given to the king only if the secret of its whereabouts becomes known. Andrew urges the king to guard the crystal carefully, as those who seek power, like Ivan, will stop at nothing to obtain it. Peter, brought before the king, confesses that he has tried to obtain the crystal for Ivan; he is banished from Poland, escaping execution by informing the king of Ivan's plans to take over the Ukraine.

A distraught Kreutz then wrests the crystal from the king's hands and tosses it into the river, declaring that the crystal brings only greed and strife. The king decides to leave the crystal on the riverbed, where it will no longer tempt power-hungry thieves. Pan Andrew is richly rewarded for his family's services, Tring flees the country, and Kreutz's madness abates. Joseph continues his studies at the university and later marries Elzbietka, who returns with him to manage the restored Charnetski estate in the Ukraine.

The epilogue shifts to 1926. The glory of the city is the Church of Our Lady Mary, still standing despite the changes time and people have made to Krakow. The Heynal is still heard each hour, reminding the

listener of the steadfastness of devotion to country, God, and duty.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Sanctuary means a place of refuge, or a place to go to be free from persecution. Throughout history, churches have been considered places of sanctuary. What are some examples in the story in which sanctuary is not honored?

The beginning chapter of the book shows that the trumpeter in the church tower is not safe from invaders. When Andrew Tenczynski seeks refuge in the Church of the Franciscans, the guild kills him inside the church. Joseph and his father are not safe in the church either, for Peter of the Button Face takes them hostage in the tower and intends to kill them.

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Literary Analysis

Nicholas Kreutz's life undergoes many changes in this story. What causes the changes in the alchemist's life?

Kreutz treats his orphaned niece, Elzbiotka, and the Charnetski family with kindness. In addition, Jan Kanty acknowledges that, while there are rumors that Kreutz dabbles in strange experiments in alchemy, the man is basically a respected scholar. While Kreutz's kindness remains, his altruistic goals do not. The first major change in the scientist occurs when he allows Tring to hypnotize him repeatedly. His niece hears his trance-induced cries and observes that he is often distracted. His behavior further deteriorates when he betrays his friendship with Andrew Charnetski by keeping the Great Tarnov Crystal without Andrew's knowledge. Tring's control over Kreutz becomes complete when the alchemist, despite his knowledge of the danger of the experiment, agrees to follow the parchment's directions to turn base metal into gold. When that experiment ends in disaster, Kreutz recognizes how he has changed and what destruction his obsession with Tring and the crystal has caused. Overcome with remorse, he grabs the crystal, denounces it for its evil potential, and flings it into the river, where it can do no more harm.

Inferential Comprehension

What is the value of taking a vow?

A vow can be as rewarding to the person who takes it as it is to the people on whose behalf it is taken. The Heynal, a hymn played hourly to honor the Virgin Mary, reminds listeners of their faith. The trumpeter, who vows to play the Heynal faithfully to death, also benefits by making this commitment. His own faith and sense of purpose toward God and country is renewed. Although he must play without fail through illness, inclement weather, and danger, he is rewarded with the knowledge that his profession is of value to society. Pride and personal discipline carry over into the trumpeter's personal life, often enabling him to be effective in family and social relationships. Today, people take vows in many ways. Doctors and government officials, for example, take professional vows to carry out their duties in a manner that benefits the public. In a civic sense, jurors vow to presume the innocence of the accused and to make judgments based on fact, not opinion. Socially, people who marry pledge commitment to their spouses. In each case, the vow is demanding but the rewards are great.

Constructing Meaning

Tring uses persuasion to convince Kreutz to do things that are not good for him. Sometimes adults or peers try to lure young people into inappropriate, unhealthy, or dangerous behaviors. What are some ways in which young people are persuaded to do something they should not, or do not want to do? What are suggested responses to these persuasive tactics?

Students should discuss media (newspaper, magazine, radio, television, movie, music) promotions of unacceptable behavior. They should also share popular peer comments made to persuade teens to engage in harmful activities. Next, students should consider appropriate responses to these persuasive attempts, including the option of remaining silent and walking away.

Teachable Skills

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Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The novel includes detailed descriptions of medieval garments worn by people of different cultures and professions. Have students research clothing in Eastern Europe and the Middle East during the Middle Ages. Ask each student to select a memorable clothing description from the book, copy the exact wording of the description, and explain why this clothing is appropriate for the individual. Practicality, economic status, profession, and culture should be considered in student explanations.

Recognizing Setting The regions of Poland and the Ukraine were in turmoil at the time of the story, with invasions from groups of people from the East. Ask the students to find the region on a map and identify the cities, regions, mountains, and rivers mentioned in the story. Have students research Polish history to determine at least four different powers that have ruled this region since 1462. Students should construct time lines from 1462 to the present that display their research results.

Comparing and Contrasting Have students compare Elzbietka and Joseph's mother to girls and women today. In what ways are they similar in behavior, opportunities, and attitudes? In what ways do they differ? Students should organize their information in charts.

Responding to Literature Johann Tring persuades Nicholas Kreutz to undergo hypnotic trances in order to gain knowledge. Elzbietka is aware that her uncle has changed; he is distracted and frequently cries out when he is hypnotized. However, she does not attempt to remove her uncle from Tring's influence. Elzbietka loves her uncle greatly, yet she allows him to be hurt by his student. Ask students to consider Elzbietka's decision not to intervene. What are some personal or cultural reasons that may have affected her decision? Would students intervene if they were in a similar situation? Students should then write a response, either defending or criticizing Elzbietka's decision.