



Laid-Back West, Inc.

Hank the Cowdog

The Case of the

Runaway Windmill

Study Guide for Teachers

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for Laid-Back West, Inc.

Curriculum Supplement
The Case of the Runaway Windmill

Story written by John Erickson
Curriculum written by Cyndy Unwin

Student Learning Objectives

- Students will understand and relate to the events in the story by exploring their own personal responses and predictions.
- Students will enhance their comprehension and enjoyment of the story through discussion, writing, illustration, and hands-on learning experiences.
- Students will explore and discuss the values of friendship and honesty.
- Students will become familiar with the metaphoric techniques Erickson uses to create vivid imagery in his writing.
- Students will examine techniques that promote humor in writing (such as malapropism and exaggeration).
- Students will become more familiar with the newspaper and its content and structure.

Chapter 1

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. Who are the main characters in this story? What are their relationships to each other? (Students who are familiar with other Hank stories can assist with elaborating on this topic.)
2. Describe Hank's logic about how he thinks windmills can fly. Is this logic correct? Why or why not?
3. Name two other objects that, if Hank's logic is correct, could run. Do they really run?

Activities:

1. Form groups of four and for each group, cut out a large section of bulletin board paper to make a wall mural. Write the title and author of this story in the middle of the mural. Clip each day's chapter of the story from the newspaper and tape or glue it to the mural. Then, as you read, illustrate around each chapter with scenes from the story.
2. Create a word play booklet for the story, and divide it into two sections: real words, and Erickson words. For the following words, use the context of the story to guess and discuss their meanings, looking the real words up in the dictionary if necessary to verify. Write or illustrate the meanings in the booklet.

Real words: villains, droning, summoned
Erickson word: tongulary

Journal:

If you could pick one object with legs that doesn't really run and *make* it run, what object would you pick? Why?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. In today's newspaper, look carefully at the comic strips and how they are drawn. Create a simple black-and-white comic strip based on the events of this chapter, using the same techniques you see in the comics in the paper.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: countermeasures, actuality, mockery
Erickson word: mouthalary

Journal: What makes someone (or some dog!) smart? How do you define intelligence?

Chapter 3

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Hank call Drover in this chapter? What does that mean?
2. What is a malapropism? (Ask your teacher!) Give one example of a malapropism in this chapter.
3. Why don't horses use grease?
4. Why were Slim and Loper mad?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. John Erickson uses a technique called metaphor in this chapter when he writes this: "We went roaring up to the house, bending trees in the wake of our jet engines and firing off Preliminary Warning Barks as we flew past the gas tanks." A metaphor is when something is compared to something else without using the words "like" or "as." In this case, Erickson is comparing the two dogs to jet airplanes. List all the words in this passage that compare the dogs to jets. Then, rewrite this paragraph, using another metaphor for comparison.
3. A simile is also a type of comparison, but it uses the words "like" or "as." For example, "her hair was as golden as the summer sunshine." Look at the advertisements in recent newspapers to see if you can find any use of similes or metaphors in the product or service descriptions.
4. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: preliminary, caliche, swathers

Erickson word: earatory

Journal: Have you ever been called a name (or known someone who was called names)? Describe. What does it feel like?

Chapter 4

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe what you think this means: "...the longer it is, the afternooner it seems."
2. Explain how Erickson uses a play on words to make this funny sentence: "On the mention of food, you became a slave to your lower instincts." Why is it funny?
3. Do you agree with Hank when he says, "A dog should smell like a dog"? Do you have any smelly dog horror stories to share?
4. How did Hank manipulate Drover into letting him eat first?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Read aloud *Dog Breath* together. Compare the humor techniques Erickson uses to those used by the author of *Dog Breath*.
3. Invent a very smelly dog. Write a classified ad for the newspaper trying to convince someone to adopt this dog.
4. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real word: impulses

Erickson words: instincts, foodly, afternooner

Journal: Which dog would you rather have as your pet, Hank or Drover? Explain.

Chapter 5

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. Irony is when something is actually the opposite of what it seems. John Erickson uses irony when Hank says this: “Without maturity, Drover, we are doomed to a life of selfish displays of selfishness.” How is this comment ironic? (Hint: Think about what Hank is like in his actions versus what he says in his words.)
2. How should Drover respond to Hank’s insistence that *he* ate oyster shells, too?
3. Why do you think there are oyster shells in the dogs’ food bowl?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. In the newspaper, find and cut out large letters that spell out HANK and DROVER. Glue them on a piece of construction paper. Then, find other words in the paper that describe these two dogs, cut them out and paste them under the dogs' names. Add these character collages to your wall mural.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: duped, elite, comradeship

Journal: Define what you think maturity is. Is Hank mature? What mature decisions have you made in your life?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Look at the headlines for the front page articles of the last three days' newspapers. How many world current events could involve undercover spy work? Discuss.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: penetrated, tampered, echelon

Erickson words: snork, werk, sniggle, wump, snick, snicklefritz, muffle, poof, murf, womp, wurp, snurp, monking

Journal: Do you think there are spies from other places here in our country? Should we act like Hank all the time, suspecting everybody and everything?

Chapter 7

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. At the beginning of this chapter, what big word is Hank trying to say? What does it mean?
2. What's the difference between "catching a red-handed spy" and "catching a spy red-handed"? Why is the order of the words in the sentence important?
3. What malapropism did Hank say in this chapter? What word was he trying to say?
4. Who's J.T. Cluck? Do you agree with Hank that he's an undercover spy?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Look in the newspaper to find large vocabulary words. With five of the words, make up your own malapropisms and try them out on your friends.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: schemed, espionage, alleged

Journal: Do you agree with what Hank said about words that can't be spelled? Why or why not? How could the problem of hard-to-spell words be solved?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Carefully read the scene where the chickens are trying to get the shells. Try to form a mental image of this scene in your mind. Then, draw a detailed picture of what you think it must have looked like.
3. Pull out the advertising flyers from the newspaper and look them over. What items are the most expensive? What makes them valuable?
4. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: massive, throng, frenzy

Journal: Choose a very common and inexpensive object that you use in your daily life. What would happen if this object suddenly became very rare and highly desirable?

Chapter 9

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. What's Slim's opinion of Hank? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. What's Hank's explanation of how a windmill works? Do you think it's a good explanation? Why or why not?
3. What do windmills do with the oil?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Research on the Internet or in a book how actual windmills work. Compare what you find out with Hank's version of how a windmill works.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: hasty, conspiracy, bodacious, reservoir

Journal: Do dogs have a purpose in this world? Describe. Why do you think Hank and Drover are on the ranch?

Chapter 10

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it a problem to be in the top of a windmill tower when a storm hits?
2. What's a windmill brake? What happened to the one on this tower?
3. Who's smarter in this chapter--Slim or Hank? Why do you think so?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Make a chart of the weather for the last five days, using the data from the weather page of the newspaper. On the chart, make a column for wind speed, high and low temperature, and storm activity. Then, for each day, predict how a windmill would have acted for each type of weather.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: encrypted, merely, stranded

Journal: Have you ever made a decision like Slim did (not a windmill decision, but a decision that happened too quickly, with too little thought)? Describe what happened.

Chapter 11

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. What does EM stand for?
2. What does the message on the tower remind you of?
3. What is “a squirt of Encrypted Message Fluid”? Is it a means of communication in real life? Why or why not?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. EM, QS, and DS are examples of acronyms--when the first letter of a series of words are said in order to abbreviate the name of something. Look at the classified ads in the newspaper. Can you find other examples of acronyms? Write an advertisement to sell something (like a car or a house), using the acronyms you found in the ads you read.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: lingered, analysis, amassed

Erickson words: snifferation, skyosphere

Journal: Will Hank and Drover be helpful to Slim? If so, which one will do more to save the day? Write your own ending for this story.

Chapter 12

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of danger is Slim in? What is the most dangerous thing that could happen to him? Why?
2. What is Hank's idea of a solution to Slim's problem?
3. Find two examples of metaphor in this chapter. List the words that compare one thing to another in each example.

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Pretend you are a newspaper photographer and you are covering the story of Slim getting stuck on the windmill. Draw a picture of what a photograph of Slim would look like right now.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: venture, bunker, ordnance, artillery, recoil, parameters

Journal: What would you do if you were in Slim's position?

Chapter 13

Name: _____

Discussion Questions:

1. How did John Erickson use the word “gopher” as a play on words?
2. How did the confusion about the “mysterious hairy legs” come about?
3. Do you think the dogs will chase the rabbit/badger? Why or why not?
4. What’s funny about this sentence? “Slim’s hands were now in our fate.”

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. This chapter is enjoyable to read because it's funny. Is the newspaper funny? How many examples of humor can you find in the newspaper?
3. Add this word to your vocabulary booklet:

Real word: plunged

Journal: What makes you laugh? How could you write in such a way that would make people laugh?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Read the Dear Abby column in the newspaper. Then, write a letter from Drover to Abby asking for advice.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: concentration, frenzied

Journal: What subjects do you know so much about that you could write a really good story about them?

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. An adjective is a word that describes a person, place, or thing. Search through the newspaper and cut out adjectives that describe Hank, Drover, and the coyotes. Make a chart with three columns and paste the words under each name.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: cannibals, initiate, commence, vigorous, maneuver

Journal: Rewrite this chapter from the rabbit/badger's point of view.

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Write a letter to the editor about the way Hank treats Drover. In your letter, talk about the qualities of good friendship.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: subtle, idle, disposition

Journal: Describe the qualities of a person you consider to be a good friend.

Activities:

1. Cut out today's chapter from the newspaper and add it to your wall mural. Illustrate scenes from the chapter around the clipping.
2. Pretend you are a reporter for the newspaper. Interview Hank and Drover about what happened with Slim. Write a news article about your interview.
3. Add these words to your vocabulary booklet:

Real words: coveted, detained

Erickson word: nickering of time

Journal: Who should take the credit for saving Slim? Why do you think this?

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