

Song of Sampo Lake

Written by William Durbin

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Teachers GUIDE

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Matti attempts to make new friends and accept life in America while he struggles to earn his father's respect, clearing land on the family's homestead, teaching English to younger immigrant children, and working as a store clerk.

Fearful of the Russian army, resenting the work he does for the landowner, and dreaming of owning his own land in America, Matti's father makes the decision to move his family from Finland to America. Matti finds it difficult to accept the new way of life, missing his homeland and working underground in the mines for long hours. When Uncle Wilho is killed in a mining accident, the family decides to pursue their dream of owning land. So, Matti and his father move to the Minnesota homestead, clearing land and building a home for his mother and younger twin sisters, while his older brother remains at the mines to earn money. In Minnesota, Matti soon makes new friends and becomes an accepted member of the community, earning his father's respect for his hard work and dedication to helping settle their new homestead.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

After teaching for over 25 years and publishing eight books for children, Mr. Durbin enjoys reading and writing at his lakeside home on Lake Vermillion in Minnesota. His other hobbies include golf and canoeing. Mr. Durbin enjoys visiting schools and libraries where he talks to children about his life, his writing, and the experiences that have inspired the ideas for his books.

TEACHING IDEAS

Pre-Reading Activity

Many people immigrated to America in the early 1900s. Brainstorm why people would leave their country, families, and way of life for the unknown. Ask students what might motivate them to make the same decision? Discuss with students the hardships immigrant families have had to endure. The voyage to America? Finding work and a place to live? If you have students that have moved here from another country, ask them to share their experiences.

In the Classroom

Stories about immigrants reveal the sacrifices people were willing to make for freedom and land of their own. Most immigrants endured long, hard voyages and abandoned family and possessions to make a better life for their future. The *Song of Sampo Lake* will spark discussions about themes, including the American dream, overcoming challenges, respect, and family relationships. These discussions can be used as a springboard to study various aspects of the language arts, science, math, and geography curriculum.

Thematic Connections

American Dream—The American Dream has changed through the years, but in the early 1900s Finnish immigrants coming to America hoped for a better life with more freedom and prosperity than they experienced in their country. Did Matti's family achieve their dream? Why or why not? Ask students what their American dreams are and how they will work to achieve it?

Overcoming Challenges—Matti and his family worked hard to overcome the many challenges they faced as immigrants to America. Brainstorm a list of hardships they had to overcome in order to achieve their goal. Ask students what challenges have prevented them from attaining a personal goal? What steps can they take to overcome these challenge?

Respect—Matti tries so hard to win the respect of his father.

What does he do to earn his respect? Was he successful in his endeavor? Why or why not? Whose respect would you like to earn? How can you earn it? What can you learn from Matti's example?

Family Relationships–*Sisu*, the Finnish word “that meant strength, courage, and stubbornness all wrapped into one” (p. 2) was evident in all members of Matti's family. Discuss how each person demonstrated his or her *sisu*, and how that *sisu* helped them work together to achieve their dreams and goals. Ask students who they know that possess *sisu* and how they demonstrate it. What can students do to show they have *sisu*?

Connecting to the Classroom

Language Arts–Matti's parents used several clichés to teach life lessons to Matti and his twin sisters. Ask students to choose one of the sayings they find in their reading, and explain what it means and how they can apply it to your life.

“There'll be time enough to rest in the grave.” (p. 116), “If you weep in this house, you weep alone.” (p. 154), “Better a spoonful of porridge than an empty pot.” (p. 163).

Science–When Matti rescues the baby crow, he feeds it, takes care of it, and bonds with it, making it his pet. Have students research crows to discover if they can be raised as pets. Matti's crow snatches shiny things and buries them. Is this common behavior for a crow? What other characteristics do crows have? The following website will get students started:
<http://www.shades-of-night.com/aviary/birdpet.html> In pairs, students can write a brochure on crows.

Science–The caterpillars threatened to destroy everything in their path devastating the people and leaving them powerless to kill them. In recent times, what insects have been similar nuisances? How did society deal with them? Ask students to research ways we can eradicate pests in the 21st century that were not available to the early settlers. Using the information they have found, have students prepare “Wanted Posters” for the nuisance insects that have plagued our country.

Science—Matti learned from his teacher that a lever and a fulcrum could help move heavy objects, and he used that information to help his father remove the large rocks from the land they were plowing. Ask students to draw a diagram of this and other simple machines in action on a farm or other work settings. Display the drawings around the room. The following web page will be helpful:

http://www.professorbeaker.com/lever_fact.html

Geography—Matti frequently compares his home in Finland to the family’s homestead in Minnesota. Ask students to find a partner—have one research the countryside of Finland and the other partner the land in Minnesota. Students can also choose a state and compare it to another country. Make a list of the similarities and differences, then have students report them in a newspaper with interesting facts about the area.

Geography—The sauna that Matti’s father was so determined to build comes from the heritage and traditions of the Finnish people. Have students research the Finnish sauna and explain why it was so important to the community. How was it built, and how did it work? Are they still in use today?

VOCABULARY

An idiom is defined as an expression that is peculiar to itself grammatically and cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its words. Billy Winston’s use of idioms confuses Matti’s literal understanding of the English language. What do the following idioms mean? “*Has the cat got your tongue?*” (p. 27), “*The whole Kit and Caboodle.*” (p. 91), “*Take it with a grain of salt.*” (p. 91), “*Hold your horses.*” (p.106).

Ask students to brainstorm a list of idioms they use or hear, and discuss how the idioms might have originated.

BEYOND THE BOOK

Internet Resources

Finnish Immigrants in the United States

www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article234e.htm—An explanation of the reasons the Finnish people immigrated to America in the early 1900s.

Finnish Communities in Minnesota

www1.umn.edu/ihrc/finnfest2002.htm—A showcase of Finnish art and photos from the collections of the Immigration History Research Center.

Sauna - A Finnish National Institution

virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/sauna.html—A look at the Finnish sauna; past and present.

Raising a Corvid

www.shades-of-night.com/aviary/birdpet.html—Everything you want to know about raising crows as pets.

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Prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, Crowley Ninth Grade Campus, Crowley, Texas.