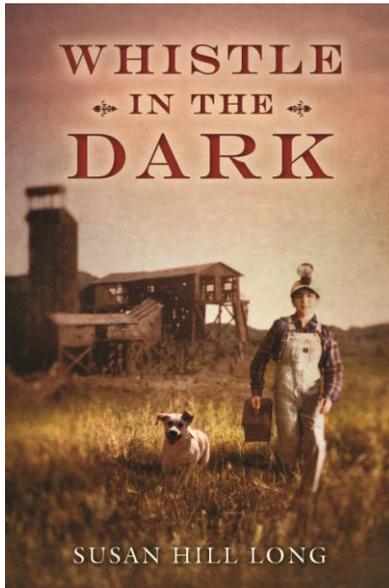


FIRST NOVEL



## WHISTLE IN THE DARK

### SUSAN HILL LONG

GRADES 4–7

#### About the Book

In a small Missouri town during the 1920s, Clem is torn between family responsibility and the life he wishes to lead when he must begin working in a lead mine on his thirteenth birthday to help his family.

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Middle-Grade Historical Fiction



## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

#### Literature/Language Arts

**Questions for discussion/writing**—This story contains several important themes. Ask students to choose one (or more) of the following and write or talk about examples of how this theme is exemplified in their own life or in the lives of friends or family members. [CCSS 5.RL.2](#), [5.W.1](#), [5.W.4](#), [5.W.8](#)

- ❖ **Desire for a pet**—Clem really wanted a dog, but it seemed to be impossible until Pally-boy came into his life. What experiences have you had with wanting/having pets? What kinds of changes has a pet made in your life?
- ❖ **Parents' expectations**—Clem was interested in reading and telling stories, but his family expected him to be a miner like Pap. How have you dealt with the differences between what you thought was important for you to do and what your parents expected of you? What are your opinions on the idea of having a job vs. staying in school? What are some examples of times when your parents let you know that they were proud of you for something you had done?
- ❖ **Communication in a family**—Most of the members of Clem's family (including Clem) rarely talked about what was really on their minds, except possibly in moments of anger or sorrow. What are your ideas of how people in a family should communicate with one another? What are some other means of communication besides talking about feelings?
- ❖ **Friendship**—Clem hated Otto when he first saw him in the mine; and he thought Lindy was, and he didn't try to stop the other kids when they made fun of her scar. But after he became better acquainted with each of them, his opinion changed. Has this ever happened to you: a situation in which there was someone you thought you didn't like, but after you got to know the person, you realized you had a lot in common and you actually liked him or her? How did you handle it?

- ❖ **Lying**—When Clem realized that his pap’s thermos was filled with moonshine instead of coffee, his pap told him to “just keep it shut about the coffee.” In return, Clem could keep the dog. Do you think it was okay for Clem to keep this secret? Are there situations in life where lying might be okay? Why or why not?
- ❖ **Death and loss**—There were several places in the story where Clem experienced great loss: Esther’s death, Otto’s death, Lindy’s disappearance, Pally-boy’s disappearance, and the destruction of their town by the tornado. Do you think Clem dealt with each of these losses in a good way? Why or why not? What would you have done differently? How have you dealt with losses in your own life?
- ❖ **Happy endings**—What did you think of the way the story ends? Would you have ended it differently? How?
- ❖ **Writing**—Ask students to do the same assignment Clem had to do in school: write an essay in 250 words, beginning, “I believe . . .” using simile, metaphor, descriptive words, and action words. They can share their essays with the class.
- ❖ **Reading**—Students may be interested in reading some of the same books that Clem, Esther, and Lindy enjoyed. Even though these were popular in the 1920s, most of them are classics that are still available in libraries: *Alice in Wonderland*, *Heidi*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Peter Pan*, and *Tom Sawyer*.

## Geography

Have students use a U.S. atlas or Google Maps to locate the actual places that were part of the setting for the story: Leadanna, MO; Annapolis, MO; St. Francois Mountains; Ozark Mountains; Joplin, MO; St. Louis, MO; and Bonne Terre, MO. Students can also search in Google Images to see how these places look now.

## Research & Online Resources

Students may be interested in doing further research on the topics listed below that were relevant in the story. These suggested websites can serve as a starting point, and students can search for additional information in print or online resources. **CCSS 5.W.7, 5.W.8**

**Lead mining**—<http://bonneterre.net/history/> presents a description of one of the towns near Leadanna and provides an excellent description of the lead mining that was done there.

**Tri-State tornado of 1925**—[www.crh.noaa.gov/pah/?n=1925\\_tor\\_ss](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/pah/?n=1925_tor_ss) presents the details and statistics of this tornado, and <http://tinyurl.com/a3lcby5> shows many photos of the devastation the tornado caused. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgCJb7ovp\\_M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgCJb7ovp_M) presents actual film footage taken of the damage caused by the Great Tri-State Tornado, which ripped through three states and is ranked as one of the worst natural disasters in American history.

**Epilepsy**—[http://kidshealth.org/kid/health\\_problems/brain/epilepsy.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/brain/epilepsy.html) presents a wealth of information on this condition written in kid-friendly language. It includes a link to the same information in Spanish.

**Miner’s consumption**—This was the condition Clem’s grandpa had that was a result of his work in the mine. [www.historicjoplin.org/?tag=miners-consumption](http://www.historicjoplin.org/?tag=miners-consumption) presents a detailed description of the mining process in Joplin in the 1920s, including photos, and a discussion of how miners contracted this disease.

**“Hail, Hail, the Gang’s All Here”**—This is the song that Lindy whistled when the kids were teasing her at school. Students can listen to a 1918 recording of it here: <http://archive.org/details/IrvingKaufmanwiththeColumbiaQuartet>

**Joseph Pulitzer**—Students can find information on the man who owned the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the important prizes for excellence in journalism that were named for him and funded by his estate here: [www.pulitzer.org/biography](http://www.pulitzer.org/biography)

**Fluorite**—[www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/symbols/mineral.html](http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/symbols/mineral.html) presents details about this mineral similar to the one Clem found that his pap smashed. Students can also search Google Images for additional photos of this very beautiful crystal.

Prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Susan Hill Long** was inspired to write *Whistle in the Dark* when she heard Garrison Keillor on his program *The Writer’s Almanac* talk about a group of men working deep underground in the mines, unaware of anything out-of-the ordinary happening on the surface, until the power went out and they climbed through the darkness to discover above the total destruction of their town. This was the great Tri-State Tornado of 1925, which forms the stunning climax of Susan’s book.

Susan has worked as an editor and has written several award-winning books for beginning readers. Her honors include Bank Street College Best Books and the Katherine Paterson Prize. *Whistle in the Dark* is her first novel. Susan lives in Oregon with her husband and two daughters.

For more about the author, visit Susan online at <http://susanhilllong.com/>.