

AFTER HAMELIN

by **Bill Richardson**

Genre: Fiction, novel

Themes: Storytelling
Courage/bravery
Magic & fantasy
Relationships
Friendships
Travel
Community

Suitable for: Grades 6 – 8

After Hamelin

After Hamelin extends the well-known story of the Pied Piper to tell what happened after the children were piped away from the village of Hamelin. The central character, Penelope, a deaf girl and hence immune to the sounds of the Piper, is both brave and clever in her efforts to find and rescue the lost children. The story alternates between past, present and future voice in a complicated but effective style that pulls in readers by making them understand how points of view change over time.

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY IDEAS ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text. Comprehension activities:

- help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
- develop reading strategies for comprehension
- bring relevance to the act of reading
- foster discussion and reflection through response to the text

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK:

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

A1. It is important that students be familiar with the traditional story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. This old story has been retold in many versions, but the differences among the versions are not as important to explore as the basic story itself. In line with the nature of the novel, retell, or read aloud

to your students, your favorite version and ask brief questions about storyline, character and setting.

A2. *“When I was your age ...”*

Ask students to interview a grandparent or great-aunt or -uncle about themselves when they were around the student’s age. Then have each student tell a short story to the class based on the interview. Encourage discussion about the opportunity to pass on stories from one generation to another with questions such as:

- What object or event triggered the memory?
- What made it easy or hard to retell?
- How did the storyteller feel?
- What made it easy or hard to listen to?
- How did you feel?

WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers’ reactions.

B1. In this novel the author recounts the story through the voice of the main character, Penelope. During the storytelling the author moves us back and forth from the 11-year-old Penelope to Penelope at 101, and at the very end we hear the voice of another Penelope who is also 101 years old. To help in these transitions the author sometimes uses changes in font. The titles of the chapters also help to separate which character is telling which part of the story and in what time sequence. To help students unravel the shifts in narration as they read, have them note these transitions on a chart divided into sections for each character called Penelope. As the book is read, note under each name the key descriptions and incidents in the story that develop this character.

Here is the start of a possible chart:

PENELOPE #1 THE OLD WOMAN of 101

introducing herself as the “Harpy Scarface” (page 2)
talking about her temper and her harps (page 139)

PENELOPE #1 THE GIRL

- at 10 (page 4), before the Pied Piper took away the rats (page 20)
- turning 11 (page 11)
- Penelope begins the deep dreaming (page 64)

PENELOPE #2 THE GIRL

- turning 11 with the promise of a harp as a gift (page 76)
- the two Penelopes meet (page 153)
- Penelope #2 at 101, concluding the story (page 226)

B2. Throughout the story the author describes many scenes that are vibrant with colors and sounds. Select brief paragraphs and ask groups or individual students to create artwork to accompany the text. When the students are finished, ask them to talk about their artwork and how it illustrates both the author's description and their own interpretation of the mood of that scene.

Here is one example of a descriptive paragraph on page 21 that students might illustrate.

Torches burned. The air was dim with soot and haze. In the middle of the room was a massive oak table, strewn with the remains of a feast. Rats scaled the table legs. They skipped along the surface, helping themselves to leftovers. Bread and cake crumbs. Morsels of meat. Parings of fruit and cheese.

AFTER READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

C1. There are many paragraphs in the story that introduce the next stage of the narrative with sentences that both give us pause to reflect on the events so far and encourage us to listen as the story continues.

Select several of these paragraphs and discuss this effect. Have students choose one to adapt as a story starter of their own.

Here are a few examples to consider:

Page 4

... No one lives 101 years if she is heedless of such signs. It was telling me that the time has come for Penelope to write down where she went. What she saw. What she remembers. And so I will. So now I will begin.

Page 72

... For yes is all you ever need to say to begin a journey. Yes is what I said. And so we started walking.

Page 139

... I am Penelope, and I regret nothing, as I have said. But that is not to say I would not rewrite the odd sentence in the story of my life, given the chance.

C2. Ask students to capture the bravery of the character Penelope in writing a newspaper article as though they are reporters and Penelope has just died, leaving her letters behind.

Review the points of a good newspaper account, including: headline, date, place, opening sentence, answers to who, what, where, when, how and why, and a concluding sentence. The article must be of limited length but interesting and convincing in its portrayal of Penelope's accomplishments.

An expansion of the classic story of the pied piper, this tells of young Penelope, left behind when the piper returns for the children of Hamelin after saving the town from rats. On her 11th birthday, she must enter the world of dreams, accompanied by an eclectic assortment of companions—a talking cat, a jump-roping dragon, a blind harpist—and eventually face the piper himself in a battle of power, greed, and music.