

FATTY LEGS: A True Story

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Teacher's Guide by Kerry Aiken

Genre: non-fiction

Themes: memoir; Inuit; Native peoples; arctic; self-esteem; abuse; prejudice; courage/bravery; right vs. wrong; bullying; memoir

Suitable for: Grades 4 – 7

Fatty Legs

Eight-year-old Margaret Pokiak has set her sights on learning to read, even though it means leaving her village in the high Arctic. Faced with unceasing pressure, her father finally agrees to let her make the five-day journey to attend school, but he warns Margaret of the terrors of residential schools.

At school Margaret soon encounters the Raven, a black-cloaked nun with a hooked nose and bony fingers that resemble claws. She immediately dislikes the strong-willed young Margaret. Intending to humiliate her, the heartless Raven gives gray stockings to all the girls — all except Margaret, who gets red ones. In an instant, Margaret is the laughingstock of the entire school.

In the face of such cruelty, Margaret refuses to be intimidated and bravely gets rid of the stockings. Although a sympathetic nun stands up for Margaret, in the end it is this brave young girl who gives the Raven a lesson in the power of human dignity.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

The following activity ideas are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

- help

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK

11. When did this book take place?
12. How did Olemaun's family travel?
13. When Olemaun's father told her "no" how did she respond? How do children these days often respond when their parents say no?
14. What does Olemaun's father tell her about the schools and the outsiders?
15. How does Olemaun feel about the outsiders' songs and dances compared to her own?
16. Olemaun has heard that she would be asked to kneel and pray for forgiveness a number of times, what does she think about that?
17. Why do you think that Olemaun stops bugging her father about going to the school for a while?
18. What quality does Olemaun possess that her father says the outsiders don't like? Why do you think this is the case?
19. At the end of Chapter One, Olemaun's father uses a rock to demonstrate the change that will happen to her at the school. What comparison does he make and what is the significance? Does Olemaun understand his message?
20. Why does Olemaun's father finally agree to let her go to the school?

CHAPTER 2

1. At the beginning of Chapter Two Olemaun describes her family's spring migration. How many schooners were traveling with them? How many families were on each schooner? How many days was the trip?
2. Who owned Olemaun's schooner and why was it significant?
3. Who was Old Man Pokiak and why was he significant?
4. What was Olemaun playing with after her father sold his winter catch of furs?
5. What place did Olemaun feel was magical and why?
6. What did Olemaun's mother say to her to try to convince her not to go to school?

7. Why does Olemaun think her mother wants her to stay home from the school? Do you think that Olemaun is correct in her thinking?
8. What things does Olemaun's mother buy her at the Hudson's Bay Company?
9. What do you think was in the white tube that Olemaun's mother bought her?
10. Olemaun's parents wanted to wait until after the first of July to send her to school: what was important about this date and what took place on that day? What reasons does she give for that day being a festive time?
11. What was Olemaun playing with on the first day of the games?
12. Why do you think that Olemaun thought the kids in the garden were "naughty"?
13. Why do you think that the children who got off the boats were feeling so solemn and, as Olemaun's mother said, "didn't want to go to the outsiders' school"?
14. Why do you think that Olemaun's mother's words stung?
15. Olemaun thinks it will be fun to work at the hospital like a nurse. Do you think it would be fun? What kind of things do you think Olemaun will have to do as a nurse?
16. Why do you think that Olemaun will not be allowed to talk to the boys, even if they are her cousins?
17. Why was the school starting to seem less inviting?
18. Do you think that Olemaun should have changed her mind about going to the school? Why? Make a prediction about what would happen if she goes to the school. Make a prediction about if she was to go home.
19. Why does Olemaun decide that she should go to the school?
20. How long does Olemaun say she stays at the school for and why?
21. What do you think that Olemaun meant when she said that the "Sisters, the Fathers and the Brothers ... were not family; they were like owls and ravens raising wrens"?

22. What do you think that the hooked-nose outsider meant when she told Olemaun's father that "you certainly can't teach her the things she needs to know"?
23. What kind of imagery is recurring by the end of Chapter Two?

CHAPTER 3

1. What did the nuns do to most of the girls' hair? Why do you think they did this?
2. What is the significance of the word "sever"?
3. Why do you think that the nuns cut Olemaun's hair?
4. How did Olemaun know that the tall girl who entered the room was Gwich'in?
5. What did Olemaun think about the clothes that she was given? What were some of the items?
6. Olemaun said that the nuns, "knew nothing of living in the North, nor how to dress for it." (p. 34) What kind of education do you think the students will be receiving since it clearly wouldn't be about the north?
7. What was the nun's reaction when Olemaun tried to wear her own stockings? Why do you think she reacted this way?
8. How do you think Olemaun felt about her name? How can you tell?
9. What did Olemaun's name mean and where did it come from? What is her new, Christian name?
10. What did Auphikookah about the ntu ris tr e rude What id i her y it es ed tt 100 Wh d d A

CHAPTER 4

1. What did the Raven wan

11. After the issues with the letter what did Agnes tell Margaret she overheard two nuns talking about? Do you think Margaret would get the chance to share her message? What would you say if you had this opportunity?
12. Did the nuns worry about the health or safety of the children on the way to the station? Why?
13. What message was to be sent home this time? Why did Margaret think that this didn't make any sense? Why do you think the nuns wanted the children to do this?
14. What did Margaret think her silence would accomplish?

CHAPTER 6

1. How did the Raven make Margaret pay for her silence at the station?
2. What was different about the stockings the Raven gave to Margaret? Why do you think she did this?
3. Who did Margaret imagine the Raven as after she got her new stockings? Do you think this is an appropriate comparison? Why?
4. What punishment does Margaret receive after Catherine called her fatty legs and Margaret called her fatty face?
5. What do you think Margaret plans to do to stop "this fatty legs business"?
6. What happened to Agnes after everyone started calling Margaret fatty legs?
7. What did Margaret do with the stockings? Do you think this was a good or bad idea? Explain.
8. How did the Raven react when Margaret came into the refectory with bare legs?
9. How do you think Margaret felt when she told the Raven she couldn't put on her stockings?
10. What do you think Sister MacQuillan whispered in the Raven's ear and what did Margaret think would change as a result?
11. What lesson does Margaret think that the Raven learned by the end of Chapter Six?

CHAPTER 7

1. What did Margaret fear at the beginning of the chapter and what message was delivered

