



SILVER DOLLAR GIRL Teacher Guide

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Research gold and silver rushes that led Americans to travel West (*The Miners*, Time Life Books Old West Series, 1981) Collect maps, showing the routes traveled by these adventurers and find out about mining technologies then and now. Compare various *rushes* and the amount of metal discovered in each. How did mining gold differ from silver? Locate and display information about gold and silver coins in use during Vallie's times.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Disguises — At Halloween, many people put on strange clothes all in good fun. Who else might use a disguise, when, and why? What troubles can arise when you're impersonating someone else? If you were to take on another person's identity, who would you become and why?

Journeys — These days, travel is easy³/₄in a few hours you can cross the state, the country or even an ocean. Imagine living in a time before air travel had been invented, before the interstate highway system or the transcontinental railroad had been completed. Why would a person or a family embark on a long journey and what difficulties might they face? What regional differences does Vallie experience while traveling? What differences have you noticed when you travel?

Runaways — How do Huck Finn's adventures compare to Vallie's? Read *Nowhere to Call Home*, Cynthia DeFelice, and find similarities and differences between this book and *Silver Dollar Girl*.

Independence — In the story, Vallie must cross Independence Pass (a real place), before reaching her destination. Once she arrives in Aspen she finds a job that will allow her to live on her own. When (at what age) will you reach that stage in life and what will be required of you? Which aspects of living on your own might be fun, which might be difficult? How does your expectation of independent life differ from that of a person your age in Europe, Asia, Africa? [Teachers may wish to highlight extended family traditions where independence is less valued. Also examine the lives of some of today's child soldiers in Africa who have had adulthood thrust upon them.]

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Language Arts — Vallie writes letters to her father, but he discovers her through a newspaper article. Write an article about something scary or exciting that has happened in your life, writing as if you were the reporter

History — The westward expansion of the United States took decades. Have student groups study pioneering movements—who was traveling west, what part of the country they were leaving, where they were heading, and why they decided to leave home.

Pinkertons — Who were they? Research Allan Pinkerton who established the agency in 1850. Who else employed Pinkertons? What role did they play in the Homestead Strike, 1892?

Mule Trains — In the years before the railroad reached Aspen, people had to travel over a steep mountain pass to reach the town. Every item of clothing, every tool, every bite of food had to be hauled in on mule trains. Dump out your backpack. Examine every item in it and try to imagine its source. Now find out about mules. What are they? How do they differ from horses? How are they used today? (i.e. Grand Canyon) Why?

Railroads — The ticket seller mentions various types of railroad cars, parlor car, Pullman, sleeper. What were the functions of each of these? Today railroads are used mostly for moving freight but there is still passenger service. Find out how and where you might catch a train today. What is the schedule? What destinations are possible?

Science/Metals—For centuries, precious metals have been valued for decoration and ornamentation. Find examples of such uses of metals. What other uses have been discovered for gold, copper, silver? What are their technological aspects today? How were such metals mined in Vallie’s time? In ours?

Health — What is cholera (the disease that killed Vallie’s mother)? How does it spread? Why would a cholera epidemic occur after a spring flood? How is it prevented today?

Music — In the song, *Darling Clementine*, we find the words, “dwelt a miner, forty-niner,” What other songs celebrate the westward expansion of the United States? The gold rush or silver boom?

Visual Arts—Create a large map-mural tracing Vallie’s journey from Pittsburgh, (Allegheny) Pennsylvania to Aspen, Colorado. Mark each important location and illustrate one of Vallie’s experiences there. Where were china dolls such as ‘Maria’ originally made? How were they different from today’s dolls? What do you know about doll collecting?