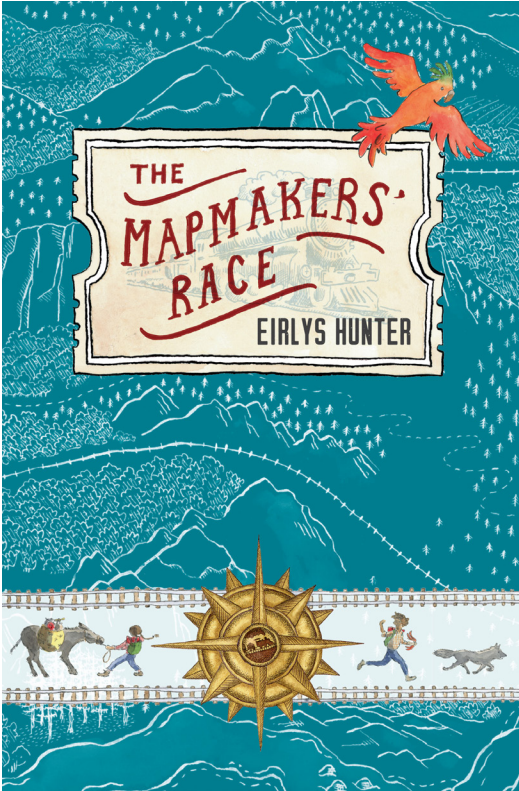


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Teaching Notes



The Mapmakers' Race

Eirlys Hunter

Synopsis

Sal, Joe, Francie and Humphrey misplace their famous mapmaker mother as they begin the Great Race to map a rail route through an uncharted wilderness. Their father didn't return from his last expedition and now their money is gone. This race is their last chance.

They have twenty-eight days to find and map the best route. There'll be bears, bees, bats, river crossings, cliff falls, impossible weather—but worst of all, they're racing five teams of adults who do not play by the rules.

The Author

Eirlys Hunter is a London-born fiction writer who lives in Wellington, New Zealand. She has published seven books for children as well as a novel and short stories for adults. Hunter teaches writing for children at the IIML at Victoria University.

Themes

This imaginative, exciting, and nail-gripping adventure story includes themes of exploration and discovery, team work, and nature and technology.

A group of five young explorers competes to win the Great Race against tricky and treacherous adult teams. They have limited resources and must learn to accept and work with each other's differences. Each character brings their own skills and perspective to the adventure of mapping a rail route through uncharted wilderness.

Activities

Level One – Text (Before and While Reading)

1. Before you read the book, look at the cover (front and back) of the book. What can you tell about the story from the title, font, illustrations, and blurb? Think about the colours and style of illustrations and what they might tell you about what sort of story this is.
2. Either on your own or in pairs find the definition of the following words that appear in the story and then use them in a new sentence: hovered (p. 2), improper (p. 3), reek (p. 24), unison (p. 31), gleamed (p. 167), sabotage (p. 182), and cacophony (p. 208).
3. The end of the final sentence on page four reads: "...fields, farms and forests flashed past the window." This is an example of alliteration, which is when several words together all begin with the same letter or sound. As you read the book, look for other examples of alliteration, read them aloud, and pay attention to how they sound. Do you think the alliteration helps create a picture in your mind of what the author is describing?

Level Two – Responding to the Text and Reading Between the Lines (While Reading)

1. On page 3 we learn that Joe and Francie are twins. As you read the story, pay attention to how Joe and Francie's relationship is different to those with Sal and Humphrey. Do you think they share a special bond? Do you know of twins who have a similar relationship to Joe and Francie?
2. Read the description and explanation of Francie's flying beginning at "Up and up" (p. 42) and finishing at "...like a rainbow." (bottom of p. 45). In pairs, discuss what you learn about how and why Francie flies. Next, on your own, draw a landscape re-imagining an area (for example, a park) near where you live or go to school. Don't worry about making the picture look realistic, but instead try and be as imaginative as possible and show the area in a new way, including re-naming landmarks. Let yourself make it fun and a bit crazy and adventurous! You might want to read page 64 for inspiration.
3. At the top of page 130, Beckett talks about how the railway line, trains, and other machines will benefit people in the future. Machines and tools, such as the altimeter, play an important role in the story. As a class, discuss what you know about the tools, engines, and machines in the book as well as your hopes and dreams for new machines in the future.



Level Three – Creating Based on the Text

1. Make an advertisement for the Great Race. This could be for a newspaper, magazine, poster, or for posting on the Internet. Make sure your advertisement is eye-catching and includes important information for competitors including entry requirements and prizes.
2. At the top of page 15 we read that the “square was criss-crossed with strings of coloured bunting.” As a class, create your own bunting and devote each flag to a character (including animals), event, theme or other details (such tools/machines) from the book using text and/or images. For example, one flag could be a description of Sal and include mathematical symbols. Make your flags bright so that the bunting is striking when people visit your classroom.
3. Chapter four, Over the Bridge, begins with a description of the Milky Way. In pairs, discuss what you know about different constellations and how they can be used for navigation. Next, come up with 3-4 questions you have about constellations. Finally, share your questions with the class and see if you can gather some answers.

Level Four – Beyond the Text

1. What other stories do you know of in which children go on adventures without their parents or other caregivers? What are some of the similarities and differences in those stories compared with The Mapmaker’s Race. Discuss in small groups or as a class.
2. In pairs, research place names in your area using the library or Internet. Places could include towns, mountains, rivers, parks, and roads. In particular, look for places that have more than one name (for example English and Māori) and see if you can find their origin (how they came to be given that name).
3. Create a poster celebrating the life and achievements of a famous explorer. Make sure you include important dates and events in their lives and some of the challenges they overcame. It would be a good idea to include descriptions (images and/or words) about the time and circumstances when they were explorers. An explorer 200 years ago would have had very different equipment to an explorer today.