M.C. Higgins, the Great

Whole-Novel Discussion and Activities

BURNING ISSUES

1. Some critics of this novel have objected to the violent behavior shown by some of the characters. Do you think the book is too violent? Why or why not?

2. When Lurhetta asks Macie Pearl what kind of work her mother does, Jones tells her that people in the hills don’t ask questions. How do people decide which questions are too “personal” to ask?

3. M.C. finally takes action to save his home. Has there been a time when you realized that you couldn’t count on other people to solve a problem for you? What did you do to solve your problem?

4. The dude tells M.C. that fame would change Banina. How do you think becoming famous could change a person?

5. What if, at the end of the story, Banina went on to become a famous singing star? Would this be a more effective end to the novel? Why or why not?

CHOICES ACTIVITIES

1. Geography Climb Every Mountain. M.C. Higgins loves his home in the mountains and hills near the Ohio River. What would it be like to visit the central Appalachian region? Work with several classmates to design and present a travel campaign for this scenic area of the country. Choose a leader to direct the group’s discussion and a recorder to track assignments. Your travel campaign can include brochures, posters, radio and TV advertisements, and speeches. Include some descriptions from the novel in the campaign.

2. Music Front Porch Singing. The character of James K. Lewis was inspired, in part, by the song-collecting work of Alan Lomax. Lomax traveled to many parts of the world, making “on location” recordings of folk music—the music and songs of everyday people. Using a library or other sources of recorded music, try to find samples of folk music that were recorded in places other than a professional recording studio, such as prisons, churches, or people’s homes. Share your findings with the class, including a brief oral report on the circumstances under which the recordings were made, and what you think those circumstances might have added to the recording.

3. Art The Milestone Book. At the end of this novel, M.C. is only two days older than he was at the beginning, but he has come a long way on the road to maturity as a result of his adventures. On your own or with a partner, make a scrapbook or memory book that shows several milestones, or key events, that you think helped M.C. to grow. Use a variety of types of artwork, such as magazine illustrations, newspaper clippings, or your own drawings or photographs to illustrate the milestones in M.C.’s life. As you show your milestone book to the class, invite classmates to share their impressions of the events you illustrated.
4. **Television: Talk Show Live from Sarah’s Mountain.** Suppose that several members of the Killburn and Higgins families have been invited to appear on a television talk show to debate the relative merits of life on Sarah’s Mountain and on Kill’s Mound. Work with three or four classmates to plan and present the discussion. Decide among yourselves who will play the part of the talk show hosts and who will portray representatives of the two families. If you can, videotape the discussion.