

# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



By: Eric Pierpoint

## THE LAST RIDE OF CALEB O'TOOLE

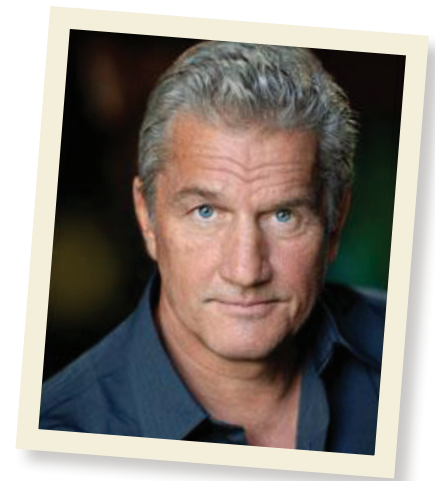
A Common Core State Standards-Aligned Activity Guide  
Grades 4-7

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

Caleb O'Toole, 12, and his sisters Julie, 15, and Tilly, 6, are left orphaned in the dangerous cattle town of Great Bend, Kansas. When he and Tilly witness a murder by the thieving Blackstone gang, Caleb must fulfill the last wish of his mother by escaping the killings and burnings in Kansas and taking his sisters to live with their aunt in the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana. With the help of a gunfighter, they make a run for their lives along the treacherous Oregon Trail, desperately trying to elude the relentless pursuit of the bloodthirsty Blackstones. Along the way, they encounter tornadoes, hungry wolves, friendly Indians, and desperadoes as they travel through the rugged beauty of the American West in 1877, when the frontier was opening to settlers and the land was changing forever.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Pierpoint was born in Redlands, California; raised in Washington, DC; and now lives in Topanga, California. He is a veteran Hollywood character actor whose credits include dozens of film and television productions. Now he has begun a writing career, and *The Last Ride of Caleb O'Toole* is his first book for children. Drawing on his family's colorful pioneer history, he has created a rousing Western adventure story, just like the ones he loved growing up. As he sat down to pull this story from his mind, he found that many of his "facts" about the Wild West came from Hollywood. He decided he had to experience for himself the journey he was going to write about. Setting out with his dog, Joey, he traced the route the O'Toole children take in the summer of 1877; from the flat prairies of Great Bend, Kansas, along the Oregon and Bozeman Trails to the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana.



### PRAISE

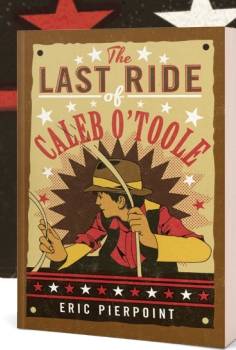
"A suspenseful adventure with heart...the fast-paced adventure serves up a hearty history lesson with side dishes of political, social, and environmental commentary. Realistic and complicated characters give the familiar story of the pioneer's journey fresh life."

—Kirkus Reviews

"A rowdy Wild West adventure."

—Publishers Weekly

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## Pre-Reading Questions and Activities

### WHAT'S GOING ON?

Have students read the title and tagline of the book, and look at the cover illustration. Read the summary on the back of the book. Discuss their first impressions of the book. Will this be a comedy? Will it be serious? In what time period will the story take place? What sort of adventures will Caleb O'Toole and his family face?

### 1,300 MILES FROM HOME

Over the course of this book, the main characters will travel 1,300 miles along the trails across the American frontier. Use a large-scale map of the United States to measure out a length of string 1,300 scale miles long. Place one end on your community. Use the string to identify where you might end up if you were to travel 1,300 miles. Ask students to think about what it would take to make such a journey. Do they think they could travel that far? What means of transportation would they use? What troubles would they encounter? What would they need to bring?

### WILD WEST HISTORY

What do students know about the Wild West? Have they read any other books about it? Have they seen TV shows or movies? What do they know about life in pioneer days? Discuss what things they have seen or read. Encourage them as they read the book to be aware and notice how this book is the same as the stories they know and how it is different.

## Discussion Questions and Activities

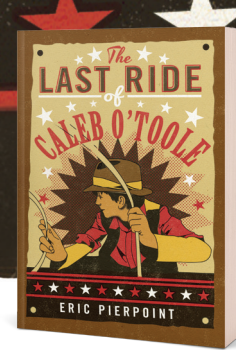
### VOCABULARY BULL'S-EYE

Give students a sheet of paper with a bull's-eye drawn on it. As they read the book, ask them to note interesting words. If they know the meaning of the word, write it in the center of the bull's-eye. Words that they might recognize or understand from the context of the story go in the middle ring. The outside ring is reserved for words about which they have no idea. Ask them to: "Think. Pair. Share." Think about what they're reading and the words they know. Pair up with another student and share their words. See if they can help each other with the word





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## Discussion Questions and Activities Continued

meanings. Students should consult a dictionary for any words still not understood. Periodically through the book, come together as a class and have pairs share their words, especially the ones that stumped them. Pay particular attention to words with regional significance, or words related specifically to the period. Examples include “buckboard,” “Redleg,” “bleeding,” etc.

RL 4.4, 5.4, 6.4 RF 4.4, 5.4 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 L 4.4, 4.6, 5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6

### CALEB'S PERSPECTIVE

This book is told from Caleb's point of view. Discuss the concept of the narrative voice (first person, third person, etc.), and the point of view character. As a class, select a part of the book and how it might look from a different character's point of view. Encourage students to imagine how this book might be different if it were told from other points of view, such as Caleb's sister Julie, the Blackstone gang, Henderson the gunfighter, or even Tumble the dog. Have each student select a pivotal scene and rewrite it as seen through the eyes of a different character.

RL 4.3, 4.6, 5.3, 5.6, 6.6 W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

### FACT OR FICTION

This book is a work of historical fiction. It blends real historical events with fictional characters and a fictional plot. Have students break into small groups and choose one or two facts or events that stand out from their reading of the book. Using the Internet or other reference tools, have them research these events and determine if they are true or not. Examples of events include: the Railroad Strike of 1877, Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce flee through Yellowstone, cholera epidemics, women being trained as doctors, etc. When they are done, have groups present their research to the class.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 W 4.7, 4.9, 5.7, 5.9, 6.7, 6.9 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

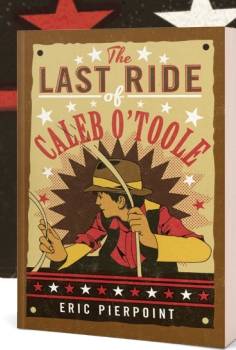
### HIGH POINT

Ask students to identify their favorite part of the book. Have them review that section, reading it carefully. Working as individuals, have them write a one-page essay explaining their choice, citing specific reasons for it and sections of text they find effective or well-written. Break the class into pairs and have them discuss their selections. Based on feedback from this conversation, instruct students to refine and rewrite their paragraphs. When they are done with the revisions, have students share their favorite part of the book with the rest of the class.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 6.1 W 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10 SL 4.1, 4.4, 4.6, 5.1, 5.4, 5.6, 6.1, 6.4, 6.6



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## Discussion Questions and Activities Continued

### EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Have students create a comic strip/graphic novel style treatment of a sequence of events from the book. What's different about this format versus the book? Was it challenging to tell the story in this way? Have students present their comic strip to the class and explain what scene was illustrated, why that scene was chosen, and what details and elements were included. Create a display showcasing students' work.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5 SL 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5

OR...

### MAKE A SCENE

Ask students to choose a favorite scene from the book. Using the medium of their choice, have them create a diorama of that scene and write a description of the scene to accompany their diorama, summarizing the action they are depicting. Create a display showcasing students work.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2 SL 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5

### SURVIVOR: OREGON TRAIL

One of the big themes of this book is coming of age. From the beginning of the book to the end, all the children grow and change. Have students identify what specific skills the O'Toole children learned (shooting, tracking, first aid, etc.). Build from these specifics to identify more general life skills the children developed. Discuss how they changed and grew over the course of the story. Cite specific evidence from the text.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

### HELPING HANDS

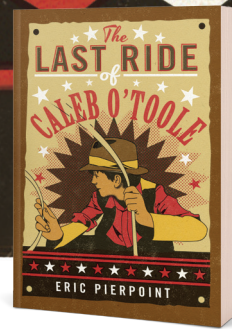
A recurring message in this book is that we all need help, and working together can make it possible to achieve great things. Ask students to think about the different adults who helped the O'Toole children on their journey. Have students break into pairs to discuss the most important characters who helped the children, the effect they had on the children, and any skills they taught them or gifts they gave them. Come together as a class to share ideas. Compile a comprehensive list of the influential characters in this book.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1





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## Discussion Questions and Activities Continued

### A PIVOTAL MOMENT

Caleb and his sisters were traveling this land at a pivotal point. One of the major changes was the way the American Indian tribes were being removed from their lands and the settlers were moving in. A way of life was changing, disappearing for good. Ask the class to describe Caleb's interactions with the different Indians and tribes he met. Have students discuss how Caleb responded to each encounter, and how he felt toward the Indians. Have students cite specific passages. Be sure to look at the encounters from the Indian viewpoint as well. Discuss how the Indians responded to him. Discuss the main concerns of each group of Indians as presented in the book. Identify how other settlers felt and acted toward the Indians. Discuss how the army, different officials, and government representatives behaved.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

### LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Caleb uses several different guns during his journey—both rifles and pistols. When he has reached the ranch that is their destination, he must trade his rifle for supplies they need. Have students describe how Caleb feels about trading the Henry. Using evidence in the text, discuss whether the deal was fair. Ask students to discuss how they felt about the episode—did it make them feel any empathy? Were they surprised it concluded as it did?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.3 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

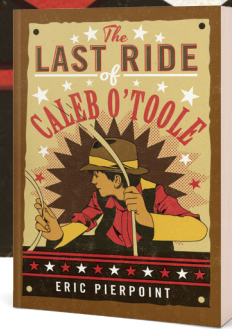
### READER'S THEATER

Break students into small groups to discuss the book. Have them select 2 or 3 important scenes that would be fun to read aloud and that would work well when dramatized. Come together as a class to share the scenes each group has selected and the reasons why each scene would work. List them on the board. Have each group select a unique scene to perform. Working as a class, arrange the performances in the proper sequence. Once students have had ample time to practice, have each group present their scene to the rest of the class, in sequential order. Encourage students to use distinctive voices when reading their character's part. If the resources are available, make a video recording of all the performances. View the entire video sequence as a class. Discuss how the scenes work together, how the plot unfolds in the series of episodes, and how the characters respond and change between the critical scenes that have been read aloud.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 6.1, 6.3, 6.5, 6.7 SL 4.1, 4.4, 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4



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## Internet Resources

[www.ericpierpoint.net](http://www.ericpierpoint.net) ~ Author Eric Pierpoint's official website. Look for more information about him and the journey he took, as well as detailed information, including pictures, and a map charting the O'Toole Family's journey.

[www.nps.gov/oreg](http://www.nps.gov/oreg) ~ National Park Service's website about the Oregon National Historic Trail.

[www.america101.us/trail/Introduction](http://www.america101.us/trail/Introduction) ~ America 101 has lots of interesting information about the Oregon Trail.

[www.sparknotes.com/history/american/gildedage/section5.rhtml](http://www.sparknotes.com/history/american/gildedage/section5.rhtml) ~ This Sparknotes guide contains dates and information about important events and people that appear in the book.

[www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1870\\_1880.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1870_1880.htm) ~ PBS Timeline of Events in the West 1870–1880.

[www.octa-trails.org/learn/people\\_places/articles\\_disrupt\\_natives.php](http://www.octa-trails.org/learn/people_places/articles_disrupt_natives.php) ~ Information about the effect of settlers and the Oregon Trail on the way of life of the Plains Indians.

[www.native-languages.org/kids](http://www.native-languages.org/kids) ~ Resources about Native Americans for kids and teachers.

[www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Comic-Book](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Comic-Book) ~ Great tips for making a comic strip!

[www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Diorama](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Diorama) ~ Great tips for making dioramas!

[www.aaronsherp.com/rt/Tips.html](http://www.aaronsherp.com/rt/Tips.html) ~ Tips for performing Reader's Theater by Aaron Shepard—includes information regarding scripting, staging, and reading.

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