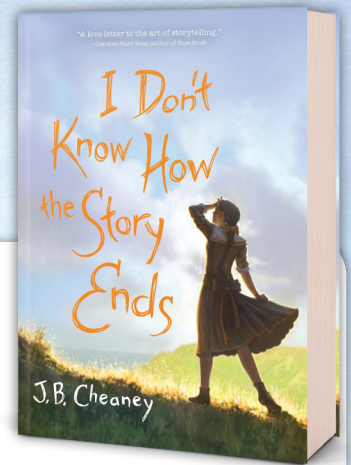


An Educator's Guide for

I Don't Know How the Story Ends by J.B. Cheaney

A Common Core State Standards–Aligned Activity Guide for Grades 5, 6, and 7



Note: The activities in this guide align with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for grades 5, 6, and 7, but standards for other grades may also apply.

Prepared by We Love Children's Books

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Isobel Ransom is anxious. It is 1918 and her father is away treating wounded soldiers in France, leaving Isobel to be the responsible one at home. But it's hard to be responsible when your little sister is chasing a fast-talking, movie-obsessed boy all over Hollywood! Ranger is directing his very own moving picture...and he wants Isobel and Sylvie to be his stars. Isobel is sure Mother wouldn't approve, but scouting locations, scrounging film, and "borrowing" a camera turn out to be the perfect distractions from Isobel's worries. There's just one problem: their movie has no ending. And it has to be perfect—the kind of ending where the hero saves the day and returns home to his family. Safe and sound.

The Wild West atmosphere of early Hollywood and the home front of a country at war form a fascinating context to award-winning author J. B. Cheaney's new novel about the power of cinema in helping us make sense of an unexpected world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. B. Cheaney was born sometime in the last century, in Dallas, Texas. She did not want to be a writer—all the years she was growing up, her ambitions belonged to the theater. But a life onstage didn't pan out, and building a stage in her head, where she gets to play all the parts, has been a pretty good substitute. When not writing, she likes to travel, read, sing, sew, do papercrafts, and sleep—though not necessarily in that order. She resides in the Ozarks of Missouri with her husband and no dogs or cats. www.jbcheaney.com

PRAISE

"Impressive on all fronts." —*Kirkus Reviews* STARRED Review

"The electrifying setting of early Hollywood, along with the ever-relevant story of a young girl's search for stability in an increasingly chaotic world, make this a winner." —*School Library Journal*

"This is a funny, insightful, and touching celebration of friendship and family, the imagination, and the power of the movies." —Karen Cushman, Newbery Medal–winning author of *The Midwife's Apprentice*

PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

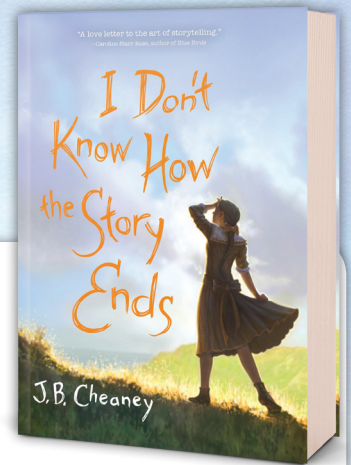
Have students examine the front and back covers of the book and discuss their first impressions of it. Will this book be a comedy? A drama? In what time period will the story take place? What sort of adventures will our heroes face, and how can students tell? Discuss the title. How might it apply to this book? (When students have finished the book, discuss this question again. Now what do they think the title means?)

As a class, discuss the process of writing historical fiction. What are the most important things an author needs to research (e.g., transportation methods, food, clothing, patterns of speech) in order to write historical fiction? How is reading historical fiction different from reading a nonfiction book about the same time period? What other works of historical fiction have students read?

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VOCABULARY

As students read the book, instruct them to be alert for words or phrases that they don't know, or that are used in an unfamiliar way. Have students make a Vocabulary Record Sheet with four columns. Have them record the word or phrase and the page where it appears in the first column. Have them derive the meaning from context in the second column, and record the dictionary meaning in the third column. In the fourth column, have them select a synonym that could have been used instead. Break students into pairs to discuss their vocabulary lists. Why did the author choose the words she did? Come together as a class to discuss the most interesting words from each group and create a class vocabulary list.

RL 5.4, 6.4, 7.4

RF 5.4

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

L 5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.6, 7.4, 7.6

POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

A Pivotal Moment

Isobel, Sylvie, Ranger, and Sam are seeing a pivotal moment in the history of entertainment, and of our culture. The movie industry has helped shape how our society, and the whole world, tells stories. Citing specific examples from the text, have students discuss the attitudes of the main characters toward movies. When the book begins, what do they know about movies and filmmaking? How do they feel about this new art form? How do their viewpoints change in the course of the story? Be sure to discuss how the adults feel as well as the children. Do we have the same attitudes toward movies now?

RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Perspective

This book is told from Isobel's point of view. Discuss the concept of the point of view character and the narrative voice (first person, third person, etc.). As a class, select a scene from the book and discuss how it might be different if told from another character's point of view. How would Father have described Isobel's reaction to him at the train station? What would Sylvie have said? Have each student select a pivotal scene and rewrite it as seen through the eyes of a different character. Come together as a class and compare the rewritten scenes to the originals. What is lost in using the new point of view character? What is gained? Does it change the message of the story?

RL 5.3, 5.6, 6.6, 7.6

W 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Storytelling

Isobel is a gifted storyteller. We see her telling Sylvie stories at night, and Isobel comments about her own ability to create stories. What strengths does her storytelling ability bring to the production of Ranger's movie? What parts of telling a story through film does she have to learn?

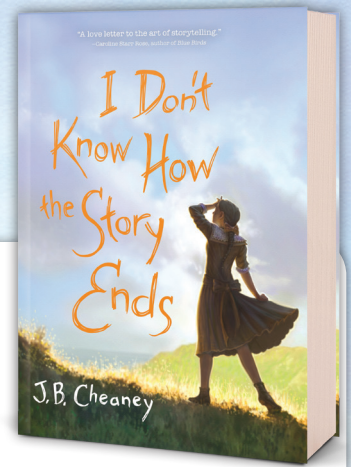
RL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

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Choices

A recurring theme in this book is that the decisions we make in our own lives have profound effects on others. Have students review the book, identifying decisions that characters made that changed the lives of those around them. Examples include Father going to war, Mother's flirtation with Hollywood, and Isobel deciding to help Ranger make his movie. Have students break into pairs to identify and discuss these decisions. Come together as a class and compile a list of the choices made by characters in this book and how those choices affected others.

RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Themes

As a class, have students discuss the major themes in *I Don't Know How the Story Ends*. Have each student choose one of the themes in the book to explore in an essay. Students should cite specific evidence from the text to show the elements of the plot, characters, and setting that are used to communicate this theme. Break students into pairs to exchange their papers and revise them based on peer feedback before submitting a final version.

RL 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2

W 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Hollywood History

Historical fiction weaves real-life people, places, and events with a fictional story to create an immersive tale that can give the reader a sense of what a time and place was really like. *I Don't Know How the Story Ends* is set in the early days of Hollywood, California. What do students know about this time? Explore the early days of Hollywood by studying the films, the stars, the directors, and Hollywood itself. Have each student select a real-life element of the book as the subject for a brief research project to present to the class. Reports should include a poster or other visual element to be displayed. Topics could include anything from the book—a movie star, a movie director, or even a location, like the sets used to film *Intolerance*. Come together as a class and have students give their presentations. At the end of each presentation, discuss as a class how the book portrayed this same part of Hollywood history. How accurate was the book? How did this real person or event help the author tell the story?

W 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, 5.8, 5.10, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.7, 7.8, 7.10

SL 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10

My Favorite Scene

Come together as a class and have students volunteer their favorite scenes from *I Don't Know How the Story Ends*. After the discussion, have each student select their favorite passage of the book to be the subject of a brief essay. Citing specific examples from the text, the essay should address the significance of this scene in the plot, how it showcases the characters, and ultimately why the student likes this scene. Does the student feel this passage is particularly well written? Break the class into pairs to review their essays and have them revise their work based on peer feedback. After revision, come together as a class and discuss the scenes the students chose.

RL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

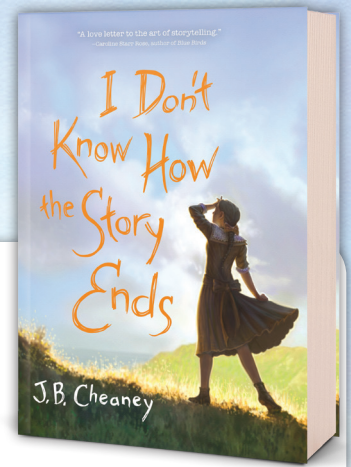
W 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

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Coming Attraction: *Love's Wait Rewarded*

As a class, use the Internet or library resources to look at movie posters from throughout movie history. How have they changed? How are they the same? Discuss the purpose of a movie poster. What information does it contain? What is its intent? Who is the audience? How does the text and imagery work together to tell a story? Have each student create a movie poster for *Love's Wait Rewarded*, the film Ranger presents at the end of the book. Create a classroom display of the final posters.

RL 5.7, 6.7, 7.7

W 5.7, 6.7, 7.7

SL 5.1, 5.5, 6.1, 6.5, 7.1, 7.5

Metaphors, Similes, and More

J.B. Cheaney's writing abounds with metaphors and other colorful language. Figures of speech appear frequently in Isobel's narrative and in the dialogue spoken by the characters. Some are original and some are common expressions of the time period. Break students into groups and have them search the text for metaphors, similes, and other colorful language. Each group should create a table that lists the figure of speech and where it appears in the first column and explains what the phrase means based on context in the second column. Come together as a class to share the lists from each group. Discuss the importance of using metaphors and similes in writing. How do figures of speech improve the reader's experience? Discuss how they help set the tone of the story, and why the author chose to use these expressions.

RL 5.4, 6.4, 7.4

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

L 5.5, 6.5, 7.5

Lights! Camera! Action!

Films and filmmaking are at the heart of this story, and through it, students will learn a bit about making a movie as it was done in the early twentieth century. Break students into small groups and have each select a scene from the book to transform into a short, silent movie of their own. Have them write out a screenplay to follow and create title cards. Have students work with a music teacher or other outside resource to select appropriate music to accompany their scene. Using whatever technology is available, have students film their short movies. Discuss what it was like to transform a scene from a book into a silent movie. What is different about this format compared to a book? Was it challenging to tell the story in this way? Come together as a class, put the clips in the proper order, and create title cards or additional content to connect the scenes together. Working with outside help if necessary, assemble the various clips and connecting material into a complete movie. Stage a "World Premiere" for the class and other interested individuals, encouraging the "stars" to dress up for the occasion. Publish the movie and provide copies to the class as mementos of the occasion.

RL 5.1, 5.7, 6.1, 6.7

W 5.3, 5.4, 5.6, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

The Shadow of War

When Isobel's father returns, she is upset at his injuries. Come together as a class and discuss Isobel's feelings. Why is she angry, and at whom? How does the rest of her family feel? How do we as readers learn this? At the end of the story, Isobel has finally started to come to terms with what happened to her father, what choices he made, and why he made them. Additionally, the strife amid the rest of the family is starting to clear. What prompts these changes?

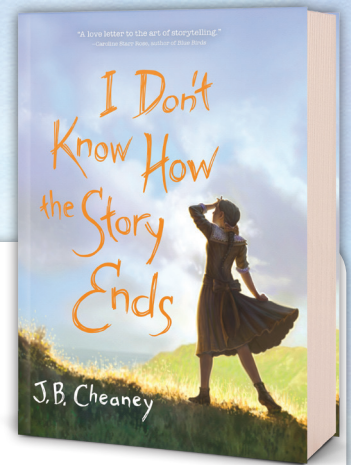
RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

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Plot Resolutions

I Don't Know How the Story Ends has a very interesting title, and a very interesting ending. The title could refer to the difficulty the children have in finding an ending for their movie, but it also refers to the way the book ends. Have each student write a brief summary of one of the major plotlines in the story, describing what happened first, what happened next, and how it was resolved. Come together and share all these plotlines and summaries. Working as a class, take a closer look at the book, especially the ending. While some plotlines have ended, the reader is left with many stories that are beginning. What plotlines are not resolved? What new stories are just beginning? How do students imagine that these events will be resolved? Which plot twists surprised students the most?

RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

W 5.2, 5.4, 5.10, 6.2, 6.4, 6.10, 7.2, 7.4, 7.10

SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Visit the *Common Core State Standards* website to read about the individual standards listed in this guide: <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>

INTERNET RESOURCES

History of Hollywood Timeline: This timeline provides a chronology of important Hollywood events.

<http://www.hollywoodfilmoffice.org/history.php>

Wikipedia's History of Film: A comprehensive look at the birth of movies and filmmaking.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_film

History of Silent Films: This site provides a brief history of the era of silent movies.

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/a-brief-history-of-silent-movies.html>

Silent Screen Star Biographies: Go to Biography.com to read biographies of the movie stars and directors featured in *I Don't Know How the Story Ends*.

<http://www.biography.com/people/groups/silent-screen-stars>

Mega Movie Making Guide for Kids: Look here for all sorts of information and resources for making your own movie!

<http://coolspotters.com/articles/the-mega-movie-making-guide-for-kids>

International Youth Silent Film Festival: Visit this site to learn more about making silent movies and entering a contest for people under twenty years old.

<http://www.makesilentfilm.com/>