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The Education of Little Tree
BY FORREST CARTER



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All references come from the University of New Mexico Press 25th Anniversary Edition of *The Education of Little Tree*, copyright 2001.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Research

Objective: Researching to provide context before reading

Activity

Working in small groups, research the topic your group has been assigned and prepare a three to five-minute presentation to be delivered before the class. Learning about these in advance will help you to understand and appreciate the novel better. In addition, each group will assemble a one-page handout dealing with key features of its topic. Make enough copies for the whole class and pass them out after you give your presentation.

Research Topics for *The Education of Little Tree*:

1. The Trail of Tears
2. Forrest Carter's life and the scandal surrounding *The Education of Little Tree*
3. The Dust Bowl and Sharecropping
4. Cherokee History and Culture
5. Naming practices:
 - How do Native Americans get their names? What is the significance of their names? What other cultures choose names that have meanings or definitions when translated into English?
6. Orphanages and grandparents' custody rights in the 1930s and today
7. Milestones in Native American Rights (for example: When did they acquire voting rights?), AIM, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 1

Point of View and Tone

Objective: Recognizing point of view and narrative tone

Activity

The point of view from which a story is told makes a big difference in **how** it is told. In a first-person narrative, we are only receiving the impressions of one of the characters, and that character's impressions will be colored by his or her age, gender, beliefs, and so on. In a third-person narrative, the point of view may be limited or omniscient. First-person narratives are always limited.

Read the below passages and fill in the chart that follows, providing both the point of view and the tone of each passage. If the narrative is in the third person, make sure to mention whether it is limited or omniscient.

Selection from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain:

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before.

Selection from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley:

His tale had occupied the whole day, and the sun was upon the verge of the horizon when he departed. I knew that I ought to hasten my descent towards the valley, as I should soon be encompassed in darkness; but my heart was heavy, and my steps slow. The labour of winding among the little paths of the mountain and fixing my feet firmly as I advanced, perplexed me, occupied as I was by the emotions which the occurrences of the day had produced. Night was far advanced when I came to the half-way resting-place and seated myself beside the fountain. The stars shone at intervals, as the clouds passed over them; the dark pines rose before me, and every here and there a broken tree lay on the ground: it was a scene of wonderful solemnity and stirred strange thoughts within me. I wept bitterly; and clasping my hands in agony, I exclaimed, "Oh! Stars and clouds and winds, ye are all about to mock me: if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not depart, depart, and leave me in darkness.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 2

Discussing Title and Topic

Objective: Completing a chart and discussion on different forms of education

Activity

If you were asked where and from whom you receive your education, your first response would likely be “at school” and the names of your teachers. You would know, of course, that that is only part of the truth: we learn from almost everything and everyone we come into contact with. The kind of things we learn often differs from learning source to source as well; we do not learn the same things from our school teachers as we do from, for example, trial and error. Many consider one kind of learning more important than other kinds. As you read *The Education of Little Tree*, ask yourself whether you do—and whether any of the characters in the book do.

Considering what you have learned and the sources from which you have learned it, fill in the following chart. In the first column, name the source, remembering that it need not be a person. In the second column, name three things you have learned from that source. In the third, state briefly how important you think the things you have learned from that source will be to you as you navigate through life. One example is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 4 – End of Book

Reading for Detail

Objective: Creating field guides

Activity

Throughout the course of the novel, Little Tree learns many lessons; these range from specific information about a certain bird's habits or a plant's properties, to more generalized statements about society and how to get along with politicians. If the information was collected into an illustrated field guide, others could benefit from Granpa and Granma's wealth of painstakingly acquired knowledge.

Outside of Granpa's opinions on politics and society, the bulk of what Little Tree learns falls into four categories:

- Plants, Trees, and Roots;
- Animals (dogs and horses need not be included);
- Birds; and
- Natural Medicine and Survival Skills.

Each group member will become a field expert in one of these areas. As an expert, take notes whenever information related to your field comes up in the novel. You will ultimately be responsible for compiling four typed and illustrated pages to be inserted into a "field guide" that will contain the work of everyone in your group. Some outside research will be required, as most field guides contain some basic factual information that is **not** imparted to Little Tree in the novel. If you are your group's bird expert and are making an entry about, for example, an eagle (Tal-con), you should include such significant facts as the life span, wingspan, eating habits, and dwelling habits of the average eagle in addition to whatever information you glean from Granpa's words. Decide together as a group what to call your field guide and what the cover should look like. At the end of the unit, you will turn in your guide for a group grade—to be determined in part by the thoroughness and artful presentation of your guide and in part by your success in working as a group.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 7

Understanding Dialect

Objective: Rewriting dialect in formal English and vice versa

Activity

When we speak to our friends, we often use language that includes regional dialects, contractions, slang, and colloquialisms. But if we were to speak to a large audience in a formal setting, we would most likely “clean up” our language and use proper formal English. The same applies to writing a note to a friend versus writing a note to an employer.

Pine Billy’s speech is rich with informalities. Below are a number of passages from the story he tells and Little Tree’s account of it. Rewrite each passage in formal, proper English. You may have to drop some words and add or change others, but try to stay as close as possible to what the characters say. The first passage is done as an example.

1. “Well, I was watchin’ ‘em, all the time; and he looked around, kinda sneaky. It hit me right off. I says to myself, ‘That’s a big-city CRIMINAL.’ ”

Rewrite of #1: As it happens, I was watching them all the while. He looked around in a bit of a sneaky way. I realized immediately what was happening. I said to myself, “That is a big-city criminal.”

2. “Now ye know, Smokehouse cain’t read ner write, and as I can make out lettering right fair, I follered him over, in case I was needed. The feller seen us comin’ and got back in his car.”

Rewrite of #2: _____

3. “They got up Granpa’s britches leg and he taken off hollering for the spring branch. I saw the yellow jackets come out, and I taken off too. Granpa flattened out in the spring branch, slapping at his britches and cussing ol’ Sam. He might near lost his patience.”

Rewrite of #3: _____
