MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RANCH

Author: Trinka Hakes Noble
Illustrator: Tony Ross
Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

THEME:
A tall tale and a visit to the Old West provide a laugh and a chance to see the "olden days."

PROGRAM SUMMARY:
Looking for some diversion, a bored Rancher Hicks drives to town not knowing that he will miss a very eventful, surprise-filled day back at the ranch.
LeVar visits Old Tucson, an authentic western town, and gets a taste of western life as a cowboy when he dons true western garb, complete with spurs, chaps and an official ten-gallon hat. Viewers meet a talented stunt woman who demonstrates rope tricks and thrilling stunts on horseback.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:
Stop the story just before Rancher Hicks gets home and ask students to predict what his reaction will be.
Discuss with students why Rancher Hicks thought the activities in Sleepy Gulch were so exciting.
Elna was very lucky with all the good things that happened at the ranch. Invite students to tell about a time when they felt they were very lucky.
The story contains a great deal of exaggerated humor. Have students identify examples of exaggeration and discuss how its use makes the story funny.
Allow students to fantasize about what they would do if they struck oil, won the lottery, inherited a fortune, etc.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:
Meanwhile Back at the Ranch has a "parallel plot," in that two sets of events are occurring at the same time. Make a chart with two headings: "In Sleepy Gulch" and "At the Ranch." Have students list the events of the story, matching what happens to Elna with what Farmer Hicks is doing in town.

Have a cookout around the campfire in the classroom. Enlist some parent volunteers to help the students prepare the food (stew, chili, beans, cornbread, or similar fare). A "pretend" campfire can be made by placing a light bulb under some red cellophane in the center of some small logs. Wear cowboy clothing and invite the music teacher to the cookout to lead the students in singing some cowboy songs.
Enlist the aid of the art teacher in obtaining some art prints or photographs of the work of famous western artists, such as Charles Russell, George Catlin, or Frederic Remington. Discuss their views of the Old West as reflected in their art.
Have students research western wear. What are the names of specific types of western clothing? Why do cowboys dress the way they do? Ranch Dressing by Jean Greenlaw (see "Supplementary Booklist") will provide some useful information.
Obtain some video of rodeos and discuss the different types of events. Consult print and internet resources as well as community members who might have some rodeo experience to learn about the training, participation, and scoring for rodeo events.
Provide a variety of materials, such as cardboard, different types of paper, clay, toothpicks, twigs and paints, and have students construct a table-top model of an old western town. Before construction, discuss the types of buildings and other structures that they would expect to find there. Encourage them to add people, animals, and vegetation as well.
Place students in pairs. One of the pair plays the role of a television news reporter. The other student is either Rancher Hicks or Elna. The reporters interview them about their respective exciting happenings.
Many children have concepts of cowboys that are derived only from the media. Identify people from the community who could visit the classroom and talk to the students about this lifestyle.

RELATED THEMES:
settling the west
ranch life

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:
Program #8 — Gila Monsters Meet You At The Airport
Program #62 — Desert Giant: The World Of The Saguaro Cactus
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Trinka Hakes Noble is the author or author/illustrator of several books for children including Reading Rainbow feature book, The Day Jimmy’s Boa Ate the Wash. A native of Michigan, she studied illustration at Uri Shulevitz’s Advanced Workshop in Greenwich Village, and presently makes her home in New Jersey.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:
The author or illustrator of numerous books for children, Tony Ross is noted for his humorous artwork. He lives in England with his family.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:
Dakota Dugout
by Ann Turner, illus. by Ronald Himler (Macmillan)

Bossyboots
by David Cox (Crown)

Rodeo
by Cheryl Walsh Bellville (Carolrhoda)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:
Boss of the Plains: The Hat That Won the West
by Laurie Carlson, illus. by Holly Meade (DK)

Yippee-Yay! A Book About Cowboys and Cowgirls
by Gail Gibbons (Little, Brown)

Ranch Dressing
by M. Jean Greenlaw (Lodestar)

Pecos Bill
by Steven Kellogg (Morrow)

Cowboy Dreams
by Dayal Kaur Khalsa (Clarkson N. Potter)

Charlie Drives the Stage
by Eric Kimmel, illus. by Glen Rounds (Holiday House)

Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story
by Julius Lester, illus. by Jerry Pinkney (Dial)

Little Red Cowboy Hat
by Susan Lowell, illus. by Randy Cecil (Henry Holt)

Cowboy
by Glen Rounds (Holiday House)