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Activity Guide

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Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie

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ABOUT THE STORY

Abbie Burgess was a real person and her story is a true one. In 1853, she moved with her family to Mantinicus Rock, an island off the coast of Maine. Her father was the keeper of the island's lighthouse. On January 9, 1856, Captain Burgess headed for the mainland to secure supplies for this family and oil for the lamps. Abbie was left in charge of the lighthouse. That night a tremendous storm developed that lasted four weeks. During that time, Abbie succeeded in keeping the light burning and helped her sister take care of her ailing mother.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The Roops have co-authored several books for children. Peter also writes historical articles, and Connie writes for educational journals. They live in Appleton, Wisconsin, with their son and daughter.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Explain that the story is a true one and takes place on an island off the coast of Maine in 1856. Describes the America of 1856 in general, briefly sketching westward expansion and modes of travel (horse, train, canal barge, and ships). Point out that ships were important because they transported cargo along the heavily populated East Coast. They also provided the sole means to get goods to and from other continents. Explain that the lighthouse, a large tower located near a dangerous stretch of water, was an important navigational aid. At night the lighthouse keeper would light large lamps on top of the tower to warn passing ships of the dangers of rocks and reefs.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "Why did Captain Burgess leave the island?"
- "Why did he tell Abbie that she would be in charge if his return was delayed?"
- "Why didn't Abbie's mother help her keep the lamps lighted?"
- "What did Abbie, her sister, and her mother do for food during the storm?"
- "Based on the story, what kind of person was Abbie?" (*Draw conclusions*)

Vocabulary

The following words may be unfamiliar to the group. Define and review each. Then ask volunteers to use the words in sentences.

medicine	trimmed	sailor	dangerous
ruffled	whitecaps	glowed	steered

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Comparing Lifestyles

Have the group make a list of the differences in lifestyle between Abbie and her sisters and students in the group. Delve beyond the obvious and compare such areas as education, entertainment, and family life. Ask the group to describe what they would like and what they would dislike about living on a lighthouse island.

Art: The lighthouse

Have children look in encyclopedias or books for information about lighthouses. Ask each child to make a diagram of a lighthouse, either a modern one or one from the past. They should label each part of the lighthouse and describe how the parts were used.

Social Studies: Map of Maine

Ask children to make maps of the Maine coastline. Provide them with atlases to use as a guide. If they can find Mantinicus Rock on a map, they can label it on their map. Have them label any other lighthouses that they find in atlases or on other maps.

Language Arts: Abbie's Journal

Ask children to imagine what Abbie must have thought and felt during the storm. Have them write a journal entry that Abbie might have written, detailing her thoughts and feelings. Volunteers can read aloud their entries to the class.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Other Lighthouses

Have children use the keyword lighthouse to find information about other lighthouses in the United States. Children can print a picture of the lighthouse they research, if possible, and write down interesting information about it. Encourage them to share the pictures and information with the class.