

## Worth

### ABOUT THE STORY

Eleven-year-old Nate injures his leg during a terrible storm on the Nebraska plains. He can no longer do his work on the family farm, so his father brings home an orphan, John Worth, to help out. Nate feels useless and jealous, but events conspire to force him either to make his peace with John Worth – or to risk losing the farm.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexandra LaFaye is a professor of children's literature and creative writing at California State University. She has written several other novels for young people, including *The Year of the Sawdust Man* and *Dad, in Spirit*. Her novel *Worth* was awarded the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction in 2005. Ms. LaFaye lives with two cats and two dogs in California.

### INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask students what they know about the Great Plains in the nineteenth century. Some students may have read books by Laura Ingalls Wilder; point out that *Worth* takes place in a similar time and place.

### READING ACTIVITIES

#### **Comprehension/Thinking Skills**

- "How does Nate get hurt?"
- "Why does John Worth come to the farm?"
- "How does Nate feel about John at first?" (*Make Inferences*)
- "Who is responsible for the fence cutting?"
- "How do their past sorrows bring Worth and Nate closer together?" (*Draw Conclusions*)
- "What do Nate and John Worth learn from each other?" (*Analyze*)

#### **Vocabulary**

Write these words on the chalkboard. Explain to students that they are words used in nineteenth-century America that are not common today. Have students arrange the words alphabetically and look them up in a dictionary. Encourage them to write the definition of each word and keep the list handy for reference as they read.

tinker	mercantile	ciphering
diviner	tenement	homesteader
barter	cobbler	

### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### **Language Arts: Rewrite a Myth**

Nate becomes interested in Greek myths after he meets Anemone. Have students work in pairs to find, read, and summarize one of the myths referred to in the story: the myth of Anemone; the myth of Persephone, or the myth of Dedaelus and Icarus. Pairs can read their summaries aloud to the rest of the class.

#### **Social Studies: Everyday Work**

Ask students to work in small groups to find out about the chores an eleven-year-old such as Nate might do in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Some references to try include *Everyday Life in the 1800s* by Marc McCutcheon and *The Good Old Days – They Were Terrible!* by Otto Bettman. Have groups list three or four such chores and then report on what they have learned to the class.

#### **Science: Lightning Strikes**

Nate is injured in a lightning storm. Have students research lightning: what causes it and what its effects can be. Students can write brief reports on lightning and share them with classmates.

#### **Social Studies: Islands of Greece**

Anemone tells Nate about the Greek Islands, where she is from. Have students research a Greek island of their choice and write a brief report on it. Students can include a map showing their island and can explain the island's history and its present population and economy.

### 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.

#### **Orphan Trains**

Using the keywords *orphan trains*, students can go online to find out about the trains that brought orphan children like John Worth westward in the nineteenth century. Have students prepare brief reports on one aspect of the trains, such as one particular route, the experiences of one group of children, or the people who organized the trains. Students can give oral reports on the information they have found.