

The Hanging Tree and Other Stories

by Dorothy M. Johnson

(Published in 1951)

Approved for use in 8th grade

Summary of the Work:

The title story, *The Hanging Tree*, is based on a true episode in Montana's gold-mining past. Three amazing characters meet: the cynical Doc Frail; the boy robber named Rune, whom Doc saves and enslaves; and Elizabeth, the young easterner who survives an Indian assault and comes under the care of Doc and Rune. In the gold-mining camp of Skull Creek Elizabeth becomes the mysterious Lucky Lady. A vigorous, psychological western, *The Hanging Tree* was made into a movie starring Gary Cooper, whom is from Helena. The stories in this book consolidate Dorothy M. Johnson's reputation for authenticity and artistic integrity. "Lost Sister" is based on the recapture of Cynthia Ann Parker, a white woman abducted by the Comanche Indians. "The Man Who Knew the Buckskin Kid" tells of two married people and an outlaw who share a secret. Fully as arresting are "The Last Boast," "Journal of Adventure," "I Woke Up Wicked," "The Gift by the Wagon," "A Time for Greatness," "The Story of Charley," and "Blanket Squaw."

Rationale:

Johnson is a well known western writer from Montana. Her stories are set in our local history and culture and break all the stereotypes of western writing. Her stories are about people, relationships, and how the environment is an integral factor. Good discussions are held around Manifest Destiny, homesteading, and the attempted cultural genocide of Indians. Motifs and stereotypes are discussed, along with the history of the 1950s western fascination.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Gallery of Famous Montanans
- "the best short story writer of the century" by Western Writers of America
- 1957 Spur Award
- 1976 Levi Strauss Golden Saddleman Award
- 1978 Western Heritage Wrangler Award

Readability:

- Lexile Score:
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Discussion of Indian stereotypes.
Some violence is alluded

Connection to the Curriculum:

See Rationale

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

- Film: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*
- Film: *The Hanging Tree*
- Book: *From Quarries of Last Chance Gulch, vol. I, II, III*