

## Approved for use in 7th Grade

### Summary of the Work:

In a blinding blizzard a school bus overturns and a young teacher, her seven pupils, and the driver—a mere boy—are stranded in the open country, miles and miles from the nearest ranch house. Thus Mari Sandoz introduces a situation that will stretch the limits of human endurance.

The exposed little group is armed with no more than the lunches they started out with and only the clothing required for a normal winter's day. As a killer storm takes hold and the mercury plunges below zero they become desperate. How each character faces the terrifying prospect of freezing to death is a story that has become a small classic. And because it is based upon fact—the author's niece experienced much the same ordeal in the paralyzing Midwestern blizzard of January 1949—it has the ring of undisputed truth.

### Rationale:

This short novel portrays the harsh, life-threatening conditions of a blizzard that every Montana student should read. The small band of school children are challenged by a blizzard in this little study of life under pressure.

Sandoz is able to evoke a convincing blizzard and tale of survival through the use of powerful sensory language. Students come to care about this group of children in a very short time.

*Winter Thunder* is a fine example of a fictionalized account of a real event from which students can analyze place as a character.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

None found

"At times Mari Sandoz was a controversial writer. At other times she was virtually ignored—at one point in her career, both *Old Jules* and *Crazy Horse* had gone out of print, while *Cheyenne Autumn* was meeting with rejection from publishers. As a writer, she tended to be ahead of her time. Gradually, however, public respect and numerous honors began to accumulate. Among these was an honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Nebraska in 1950. It was an honor deeply appreciated by the writer/historian who had launched her distinguished career with no academic credentials beyond an 8<sup>th</sup> grade diploma and a rural teacher's certificate....More than a generation later, her literary legacy endures—still read, still love—a rare accomplishment for a writer. Despite the passage of years, her best work still seems fresh, timeless, and as relevant today as when it was written."

*The Enduring Mari Sandoz*, in *Life* magazine, 2001.

\* 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 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:

- *Winter Thunder* has been named by the *Reader's Digest* as one of the ten best American short novels.

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: not available
- 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.)*

### Connection to the Curriculum:

Regional connections to Montana history and geography possible.

### Additional Connections:

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

Can be compared to sections of Judy Blunt's *Breaking Clean*, a memoir set in Eastern Montana (includes an equally harsh winter storm scene richly described).