

# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Hope's Path to Glory:*

### THE STORY OF A FAMILY'S JOURNEY ON THE OVERLAND TRAIL

BY JERDINE NOLEN

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1848, twelve-year-old Hope is a lady's maid to Elizabeth Barnett and is prized for her ability to read and write. But when Mistress Barnett's first husband dies, and the crops begin to suffer, she and her parents are sent off from their farm in Virginia to accompany her mistress's son Jason in hopes of finding gold in California. Like the name her mother gave her, she is hopeful—for safe passage, for new adventure, and for a future where she is human first and no longer a bondswoman. Together with a caravan of eager emigrants, Hope sets off for the West, facing challenges of survival, dependency, and an upending of the power dynamics that governed her life back in Virginia.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Our names can hold tremendous weight in how we view ourselves and our place in the world. Discuss the impact of Hope's name(s) on her life. How might the story have differed if she and her family accepted "Clementine" as her only name? Do you have a name that means something special to you or your family? Discuss the importance of your name with the class.
2. At what point in the story, if at all, did you first suspect that Mistress Barnett might give Hope her freedom papers at the end of their journey to California? How did Poppa's speech to Mister Jason in chapter ten make you feel about Mister Howard, Mistress Barnett, and Jason?
3. Literacy, the ability to read and write, is a powerful tool. Why, in a time when slaves were prohibited from reading and writing, do you believe that Mistress Barnett taught Hope?
4. Outside of servitude, how did Hope's ability to read and write impact her life and journey West?
5. At the end of the book, Hope rewrites one of Phillis Wheatley's poems—"On Being Brought from Africa to America." Compare the differences and discuss the significance of both the original poem and Hope's reinterpretation.
6. Examine the relationship between Jason and Ezekiel (Poppa) throughout the book. In what ways did it change, and what messages do you feel these changes revealed?
7. Momma and Poppa cannot read or write and yet they are invaluable assets to Jason's journey to California. Discuss the value Momma and Poppa each bring to Jason's trip. In what ways would the trip have gone differently if Momma, Poppa, or both adults hadn't been on the journey?

8. Despite receiving the letter from Mistress Barnett, Hope resists opening the letter until the very end of their journey. Why do you think she delays reading the missive? Have you ever received something and felt nervous to open or accept it?
9. When the caravan reaches the South Pass, Mister Cooper decides to take the Hudspeth Cutoff to Steeple Rocks, the next destination on the Overland Trail—a quicker, more rugged trail. How did this choice work out for the group? Think about a time when you had to make a decision between two difficult choices, then describe how you made your final decision. How did that situation turn out for you?
10. According to Mister Cooper, *seeing the elephant* means many things—“most amazing and surprising as an adventure journey could ever be—to see something to have never been seen before”. (chapter two) Share a time when you experienced an adventure of your own. What “elephants” did you see along the way?
11. After meeting Jim Beckwourth, Hope fears that her poppa may leave their family to join him. What do you think sparked her fear?
12. The idea of being *human first* is explored in many ways throughout the book. Discuss instances in which you noticed this. Have you ever had a moment when you felt you weren’t perceived first for your humanity? If so, how did this make you feel?
13. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” (chapter seven). Do you believe this line in the Declaration of Independence? Why or why not? Be sure to provide examples from the text or from other moments in American history.
14. In preparation for the journey, Hope was made to read *The Emigrant’s Guide*. Who did you believe to be “the poor families” (chapter six) whose deaths were caused by the guide? What evidence from the text led you to believe that?
15. Along the trail, the caravan encountered various Native American tribes. Describe Hope and her family’s relationship with the Natives. How, if at all, did this differ from other characters or emigrants they met on the journey?
16. In the story, we see Momma ensure the team’s survival by making use of natural resources and sustenance. Consider the region where you live. If you were in the wilderness, what naturally occurring plants, animals, or other materials would you use to survive? Consider using library resources to research your local wildlife growth.
17. If you had the chance, would you choose to make a trip such as Hope’s? Why or why not?
18. Imagine that you are heading on the Overland Trail to California. What would you name your team’s wagon? Share the significance of your wagon’s name.
19. Despite sharing a familial and kind relationship in the wilderness, Jason is livid when he discovers that Hope and her family have been freed by his parents. Why do you think he reacts the way he does?



20. *Hope's Path to Glory* is not the first book chronicling the California Gold Rush and the journey to get there. It is unique, however, in centering Black bondspeople and their experience of the period. In what ways do you think this story might be different if it was told from Jason's point of view, or from the perspective of the Native American tribes?



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- This Curious Quilt:** Using materials or media of choice, create a patchwork design that represents your identity as an American. On one square, each student should write a three- to five-sentence paragraph describing their patchwork. Staple the patchwork and paragraph together so the patchwork and the description both face outward. Once all patchwork squares are complete, secure them together to make a quilt of everyone's work. Discuss observations and experiences with one another. Finally, consider the following: Based on the quilt, what do you think it really means to be an American? How do you believe that a patchwork quilt helps illustrate our nation's identity?
- Discovering the Lay of the Overland Trail:** Using a map from a credited resource and your copy of the novel, create a complete log of the local food and staple items used in each location along the Overland Trail. Then select one of the stops and research the following:
  - What is the climate in this area?
  - Is there a group of people indigenous to this land? If so, which tribe?
  - Are the same items in your log used frequently today? If so, for what purposes? If not, why?
  - Collect images of the items in your assigned area to share with others.

For those researching multiple stops, consider the following questions:

- How did the resources change from Virginia to California?
- In what areas, if any, were Indigenous people most populous? Why do you think this is?
- If you were traveling along the Overland Trail, in which area(s) do you think you'd most likely be able to survive? Why?

US Forest Service Map of the Overland Trail:

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd497799.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd497799.pdf)

- Creating Context: The Indian Removal Act and the Emancipation Proclamation:** *Hope's Path to Glory* is situated between two major events in American history—the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Watch this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ya9YGfaAU4>) from NBC News to learn about President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act. Then watch the *Untold History's* video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgmIr3TGT9g>) on the Emancipation Proclamation. After watching these two videos, jot down three connections you made to *Hope's Path to Glory* and three areas in the story you'd like to know more about as a result of watching the videos. Finally, consider the following: How do you think history impacts the way that we read and interpret literature?
- Lines and Lyrics of Liberty:** Write an essay in which you compare and contrast Phillis Wheatley's poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" and Samuel Francis Smith's song "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Be sure to explore what each poem believes about country, freedom, and humanity. Finally, discuss how you think Hope would have felt about each of these poems given her life and circumstances.



5. **An Adventurer's Playlist:** Like the emigrants on the Overland Trail, imagine that you are out on an adventure of your choice. Create a playlist of four to six songs that you would listen to and sing along to on your adventure. For each song, write a two- to three-sentence explanation of why you chose that song, when in the trip you would sing it, and the impact of the song on the people traveling with you.

*For Groups:* To add interest and critical thinking, have each student create a copy of their playlist both with and without the explanations. Students may then share their playlists and listen to others' choices, attempting to guess their peers' adventures and thematic connections between the songs.

## **MORE NOVELS BY JERDINE NOLEN**

*Calico Girl*

*Eliza's Freedom Road*

*Thunder Rose*

*Hewitt Anderson's Great Big Life*

## **READ MORE LIKE *HOPE'S PATH TO GLORY***

*Gold Rush Girl* by Avi

*Minnow and Rose: An Oregon Trail Story* by Judy Young, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth

*Hurry Freedom: African Americans in Gold Rush California* by Jerry Stanley

*Guide written by Melanie Kirkwood Marshall; Kirkwood Marshall holds a BA in secondary English education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a MEd in reading education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught in many learning contexts from High School ELA teacher to Primary Literacy Interventionist. Currently, Melanie is completing her doctoral studies in multicultural children's literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

*This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.*