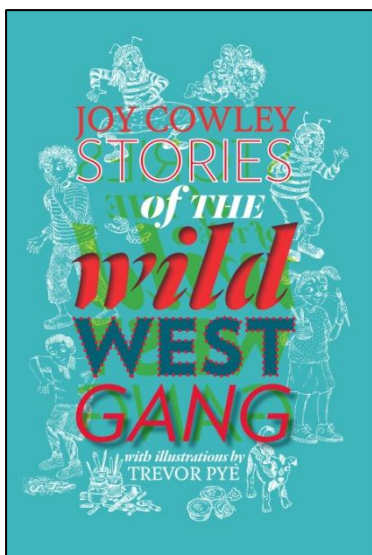


Stories of the Wild West Gang by Joy Cowley

Teaching Notes



Synopsis: Michael's cousins, the West family, are everything he's not allowed to be at home – noisy, crazy and very, very messy. Wherever the Wild West Gang goes, adventure is not far behind – and it's the sort of adventure you don't want your parents to know about. When the West family move in next door, sensible, quiet and cautious Michael finds himself thrown into their wacky and unconventional world – a world which he quickly discovers he loves being part of - as a member of the Wild West Gang.

Author: Joy Cowley is one of New Zealand's best-loved writers whose work is enjoyed by children all around the world. She began writing for children at the age of 16 when

she had an after-school job editing the children's page for a local newspaper. Since then she has written and published books, stories and learning materials for both children and adults. She has been awarded an OBE for her services to children's writing, the A W Reed Award for Contribution to NZ Literature, and the Prime Minister's Prize for Literary Achievement. After many years living in the Marlborough Sounds, Joy now lives in Wellington.

Themes: The main theme of these stories is the complexity of human relationships. The world Michael lives in is full of personality and value clashes, sibling rivalry, preconceptions, prejudices and incorrect judgments – and that's just the adults! Through spending time with the West family Michael learns to appreciate the differences between families. He sees the preconceptions and incorrect judgments outsiders have of the West children because of the family they come from, and is shown that a sense of humour and family loyalty can help in any situation. Honesty is another theme that is explored in the stories.

Activities:

1. Before reading, discuss the title, the cover illustration and the genre.
2. Draw a family tree for the characters in the stories, including portraits of some of the characters. Research and draw your own family tree.
3. What is a colloquialism? Find some examples of the colloquialisms used by Mr West. Based on your findings, which country do you think the colloquialisms come from? List some examples of colloquialisms from your home country.
4. There are several vivid similes in the stories, such as: 'as cool as a popsicle' (p.11), 'cackling like a hen' (p.76), 'Royce's eyebrows wriggled like ginger caterpillars' (p.174) and 'Royce's eyes shone like blue marbles' (p.339). Find one other example from each of the stories. Write some more to describe some of the characters featured in the stories (eg. Mickey, Miranda, Auntie Rosie, Mum and Royce).

5. There are some strongly contrasting personalities in the stories. Make a chart showing the differences and/or similarities between characters such as: Mickey and Royce, Auntie Rosie and Mum, Uncle Leo and Dad. List the qualities of the characters and find examples of when they display these qualities.
6. Royce always has a money-making scheme on the go and suggests to Mickey they become business partners. Choose a partner and create a new company and product. Design a marketing and advertising campaign for your product. For example, you could create posters, radio or television advertisements and jingles, slogans and labelling, etc.
7. Mickey is good at inventing spooky tales. Make up or re-write a ghost story as an illustrated children's book.
8. Get into groups of two or three. Choose your favourite scene from one of the stories. Devise a script and act it out in front of the class, or film it.
9. The illustrations are by Trevor Pye. What do you like and/or dislike about them? Design your own illustrations for two of the stories.
10. Write a review of the stories, aiming it at the children's page of your favourite magazine or newspaper.
11. Write an eleventh Wild West Gang story.
12. Think of and read another book which involves adventures of a family group or gang of children, such as *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, *The Famous Five Series* by Enid Blyton and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis.