

Using  
*Hannah*  
in the classroom

Hannah is a courageous girl in 19th century Nova Scotia who passes herself off as a boy to work in a coal mine and feed her widowed mother and three sisters.

- Have the class create a profile of what life must have been like for those in the mining communities of the 1800s, using the information given at the beginning of the book, and other readings.

- There was a belief in many mining communities that if a woman went into a mine it would bring bad luck. As a result, women did not work in the mines with men until the twentieth century. There were similar superstitions about women at sea. What other superstitions can the class find information on? Why do they think there are superstitions? How do they come about? Get students to find a superstition from the country where their family originated (or have them ask their relatives if there are any superstitions in their family). Have them make an ID card, describing the superstition, where it came from and how it affected those who believed in it. They could illustrate the cards.

- During the early years of industrialization there was great inequality in the work place. People labored in unsafe conditions, factories and mines were not inspected, children worked long hours, women and men were paid little for their work and had no benefits. Have students compare the work conditions in the early coal mines to conditions today. How have things changed? What protects workers today?

- In many early settlements there were no schools and children didn't have the opportunity to learn how to read and write. The post office in every town had a scribe who read letters for people and wrote down their replies. Ask the students

to pretend they are a scribe in the post office in Hannah's town, and write a letter to someone of their choice, telling her/him the news about Hannah and her family. They could make up other "news" about people and things going on in the town, based on what they learned about what it was like to live there.

- It is hard to imagine two sisters more different than Hannah and Grace. Ask the class to list all the differences that they see, not just in the sisters' appearance, but in their personalities. How do they think Hannah got the way she is? Who would they more likely be friends with, Hannah or Grace? Why?

- "Brian" gets targetted by the miners for being too quiet and reserved. Have students seen people get into trouble for keeping too much to themselves? How do they react when someone they don't know is quiet and withdrawn? Do they automatically think such people are shy, or that they are arrogant? What do students think makes people react this way? Do they think the miners would act differently if their lives were easier?

