

ENG 260

Spring 2021

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Class notes—Week of Mar.15, *Indian Captive*, Chapters 9-16

This second half of the book is the part that occurs in our own home area. The “Falling Waters” described in Chapter 9 are the Letchworth Falls, not Niagara Falls, but Old Fallenash establishes his trading post at Buffalo Creek, the future site of the city of Buffalo.

There are a few episodes in this section that strike me as unrealistic. Would a group of Seneca children really not realize how dangerous it is to try to capture a bear cub? Would throwing a rock at a rattlesnake really be seen as an incredibly courageous deed in this culture? I’m not sure I really buy Molly’s protests against the killing of animals for food, either. She’s lived on the frontier all her life, and her father and brothers must have hunted almost daily. All of these examples do serve Lenski to advance plot or develop character, though, and probably they won’t bother most young readers.

So far, no one has answered my question on the Discussion page about the changing of Seneca culture due to contact with whites. It’s a subtle but important theme here, I think. Just for one example, the idea of capturing a bear cub and teaching it to do tricks came to the children from a white trader. See what other instances you can find, and note whether the resulting shift seems to be positive or negative for the Seneca.

Molly’s decision at the end of the book to remain with the Seneca is the choice Mary Jemison made in real life. The historical Mary’s decision was no doubt influenced by the fact that she had married a Seneca and had children by the time she had an opportunity to leave. However, she was not the only white captive to make the same decision, and Lenski’s book shows why this might have been.

Questions to Answer in 3-5 Sentences:

1. How would you describe the character of Mary Jemison (Molly) as Lenski portrays her in this book? What does she seem to care about most, and does that change as the story moves forward?
2. This book was written in 1941. For its day, it was considered especially sensitive in its portrayal of Native Americans and their culture. How does that portrayal hold up to our standards today?
3. This book opens with the story of a terrifying raid on a frontier settlement and the capture of English settlers by native Americans. Lenski adapts the story for child readers, but do you think the subject matter is too intense for middle-elementary readers (say fourth-grade or thereabouts)?
4. Compare Molly’s life with her white family to her life among the Seneca.
5. How do we see the Senecas’ culture changing because of their contact with whites?
6. How does Molly change during the course of the narrative?