

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "Madame Mustache and the Boys of Bodie" with your readers. I loved researching and writing it over a period of three years and hope this discussion guide will help students reflect on the story and enjoy it on a deeper level. I've added a recipe, a few random activities, and personal tidbits that might be fun for them.

*My very best,
Kristi*

Madame Mustache and the Boys of Bodie:

About this book: When twelve-year-old Danny and six-year-old Judd lose their parents to pneumonia in 1878, they're sent to an orphanage in San Francisco. The headmaster wants to separate the brothers and send them to different families, but because they have only each other they escape. They make their way to the dangerous mining camp of Bodie, California in the High Sierra to be with their Uncle Hank.

A tenderhearted croupier named Madame Mustache (true person!) takes them under her wing, along with other orphaned children roaming the raucous town. When the boys find their Uncle Hank and learn he's involved with a Chinese woman, they realize life with him won't be what they had expected.

For ages 8-12, this is third in my trilogy about the historic American Gold Rush. Glossary and historical note included.

ISBN 9780986152207

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapters 1-15]

1. Why is Danny willing to risk further punishment to keep his brother from being adopted?
2. "No Coolies" reflects a disgraceful prejudice in Bodie. How would you feel if you saw signs in stores and restaurants that said your particular ethnicity was forbidden to enter?
3. What do you think of the orphans crawling under saloons to gather coins and bits of gold that have fallen through the floorboards?
4. Why is Danny shocked to hear Lu-Chen speak English "like an American?" How do you feel about classmates, teachers, or neighbors who speak with a foreign accent?

<> Part II: [Chapters 16-30]

1. Describe some of Danny's jobs to "pay his way." Who do you know with a strong work ethic like his?
2. Smokey Joe and Danny have a complicated relationship. What would you do if a friend dared you to do something you know is wrong or dangerous?
3. If you could play hooky for the day, where would you go and what would you do?

Activity suggestions:

<> **Write** -- These can be a brief paragraph or several pages:

1. "If I spent the winter in a snowy mountain town I would ..."
2. Describe how you would care for an orphaned dog or cat.
3. What would you do if you found a bag of money with no one around to see you?

<> **Draw**

1. A map of Bodie
2. A porcupine, mule or rooster from the story
3. The undertaker's office

<> **Make**

1. A checkerboard with checkers from your two favorite colors.
2. A miniature sled

<> **Cook**

Captain Billy's Farewell Brownies -- Because of Bodie's high elevation (8,375 feet) it would have taken him longer to boil water and to bake than at sea level. This recipe is quicker and simpler! If you don't lick too many spoonfuls of batter, there'll be a dozen good-sized brownies to share with friends. Here goes:

Ingredients:

- 1 box brownie mix (19 to 21 oz. size)
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3/4 cup applesauce
- 1 cup chopped almonds
- 6 oz. bag of chocolate chips

~~~~~

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9x13 inch pan.

In a large bowl, combine the brownie mix, eggs, oil, and applesauce. Stir with a large spoon about 50 strokes until blended so that no dry powder is sticking to the bowl.

Now add the chocolate chips and nuts. Stir until blended evenly.

Pour into pan, spreading the batter to the edges with your spoon.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Watch for the brownies to just start pulling away from the side of the pan. Poke a toothpick into the center, and if it comes out dry, your brownies ready!

<> **Read** -- My further adventures about the American gold rush:

1. Seeds of Hope: The Gold Rush Diary of Susanna Fairchild, 1849 [Miner's Creek, California] ISBN 9781515323228
2. Nugget: The Wildest, Most Heartbreakin'est Mining Camp in the West [Idaho Territory 1866] ISBN 9781505905793

**Behind the scenes of this story:**

Some of the characters also appear in my other Dear America adventures: Uncle Henry Valentine is related to the Valentine family in *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie: The Oregon Trail Diary of Hattie Campbell, 1847*. His sister, River, was born as wagons crossed the Snake River with Hattie. Their Valentine ancestors are in *The Winter of Red Snow* and *Cannons at Dawn*, about the Revolutionary War.

Uncle Henry's niece is Daisy Valentine in *Earthquake at Dawn*, set in 1906 San Francisco. I love connecting characters through history. It's especially fun when readers discover them and write to tell me.

P.S. I chose the name Valentine because it makes me think of romance and kind gestures.

**A secret about the author:**

When researching this novel my family and I made several trips to Bodie. As a California State Historic Park, it's considered an authentic gold-mining ghost town. We hiked up and down the steep hills, peeked in windows, and stared at child-sized coffins in the undertaker's office. On one of our trips, we arrived just after sunrise so a ranger could lead us through the fragile buildings not open to the public. The stamp mill filled with rat droppings, the Occidental Hotel and schoolhouse stirred my imagination. I was able to picture life back in 1878.

After the tour we returned to our motel cabin at June Lake. Our sons were enthralled that in the wild mining camp days, some of Bodie's young ruffians drank whiskey and smoked cigars. They suggested I add a character like this and agreed we needed an apt name.

Just then my husband parked in front of the cabin after a run to the hardware store, and carried a box onto the deck: a new little Weber grill with a black domed lid for cooking burgers. Big lettering on the box called it a "Smokey Joe."

Bingo! I said the name out loud and by my family's unanimous vote, the character of Smokey Joe took shape.

**Contact:** I would love to hear about your discussion. Just click the Contact button on my website, [kristianagregory.com](http://kristianagregory.com), and I'll answer you!