

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "The Phantom of Hidden Horse Ranch" with your readers. It's seventh in the Cabin Creek Mystery series. I hope this discussion guide will help them reflect on the story and enjoy it on a deeper level. I've added a snack idea, a few random activities, and personal tidbits that might be fun for them.

*Cheers,
Kristi*

Cabin Creek #7: The Phantom of Hidden Horse Ranch:

About this book:

During summer vacation the cousins are excited to visit their grandparents at Hidden Horse Ranch. They get to sleep in a bunkhouse, swim in a pond with a rope swing, and ride horses any time they want. But they arrive to find that a mysterious fire has destroyed the stables, and the herd has escaped into the nearby canyons. Also troubling, valuable objects have been disappearing from the ranch house. As Jeff, David, and Claire follow clues and suspects, they keep running into dead-ends and wonder if the ranch has a phantom. Will they be able to find the thief and solve how the fire started before more danger strikes?

Illustrated by Cody Ruttly. For ages 8-12.
ISBN 9781505450859

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapter 1-10]

1. What might happen if you jumped to conclusions about someone, but learned later that you were wrong?
2. If you could spend the summer at Hidden Horse Ranch, what would be your favorite thing to do?
3. What is a rustler?
4. Why is rustling horses or cattle such a serious crime? How was it punished in the Old West?

<> Part II: [Chapter 11-19]

1. What do you think of the title, "The Phantom of Hidden Horse Ranch?"
2. Look up 'phantom' for its various definitions.
3. What are some things you can do if you're angry, to keep from exploding?

Activity suggestions:

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

1. "If I lived on a horse ranch I would ..."
2. Tell about your favorite vacation.
3. Describe a surprising discovery you've made.

<> **Draw**

1. A map of Hidden Horse Ranch
2. The view from your front door
3. A tire swing

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of Hidden Horse Ranch
2. A cozy bed for a dog or kitty

<> **Cook**

Gram's Friendship Snack -- If friends pop in unexpectedly, I like to welcome them by setting a pitcher of water on our kitchen table with various snacks. Offering food is a friendly way to make everyone feel comfortable. You can invent your own quick menu, but here's what I often have on hand to set out in little bowls:

Almonds
Pistachio nuts
Dried cranberries
Sliced apples
Peeled oranges
Carrot sticks
Crackers
Cheese
Popcorn

Now gather around your table or sit on a porch for a good ol' chat. That's what I like to do!

<> **Read** - Cabin Creek Mysteries # 8: The Case of the Spying Drone
ISBN 9781530196531

Behind the scenes of this story:

I read a news article about an abandoned cabin in the woods that had burned to the ground. Though no one was around, the fire had started in the attic. Turns out that the sun shining in through a window had acted as a magnifying glass and ignited the old, dried pine needles that had dropped through a hole in the roof. I thought, *aha!* Perfect for the mystery at Hidden Horse Ranch.

Another part of the plot came while in a gem shop as my turquoise earrings were being repaired. I watched three resident dogs roam among the customers and the office. One of them, a giant Rottweiler, seemed to be in charge. He put his big head on the desk, removed some envelopes, then carried them to his lair underneath where he anchored them with his paw. The jeweler noticed my surprise and said, "Oh, don't worry about Buddy. He's just doing his paperwork." I laughed out loud. So that's how Buddy became a character, along with our friend's cattle dog, Reesha.

A secret about the author:

I loved summer camps where I could ride horseback. I especially loved brushing my-horse-for-the-week and combing its silky mane.

Contact: I would love to hear about your discussion. Just click the Contact button on my website, kristianagregory.com, and I'll answer you!