



**Discussion Questions for
Rattlesnake Mesa:
Stories from a Native American
Childhood**

by **EdNah New Rider Weber**
illustrated by **Richela Renkun**

*Reading Level: Grades 4 and up
Interest Level: Grades 4–12
Guided Reading Level: W

*Reading level based on the Dale Chall Readability Formula

Themes

Indian Schools, Coming of Age, Overcoming Adversity, Family, Friendship, Native American Interest

National Standards

LANGUAGE ARTS: Reading for Perspective; Participating in Society; Multicultural Understanding; Understanding the Human Experience

SOCIAL STUDIES: Culture; Time, Continuity, and Change; People, Places, and Environments; Individual Development and Identity; Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Power, Authority, and Governance

Teaching Tip

This is an excellent book to use during the observance of Native American Heritage Month in November.

1. When her grandmother dies, EdNah has to adapt to big changes and new experiences in her life. Why are these difficult for her? What changes and experiences have you had to adapt to?
[“Crown Point,” pp. 3–5; “The Little Girl,” pp. 35–38]

2. Nanah, Little Fat, and EdNah spend many hours on Rattlesnake Mesa. How do their activities on the mesa reflect their Native American heritage? What kinds of things might you and some friends have done there?
[“Rattlesnake Mesa,” pp. 7–11; “Lizard Children,” pp. 13–14; “Holy Smokes,” pp. 20–23]
3. Why do you think Nanah, Little Fat, and EdNah take Grey Eyes’ team? How do you think he felt? What was he thinking? Why didn’t he say anything?
[“Rattlesnake Mesa,” pp. 7–11]
4. EdNah writes about various people who were part of her childhood community at Crown Point. Choose one and tell how that person influenced her.
[“Crown Point,” pp. 3–5; “Feast,” pp. 39–41; “Smiley,” pp. 25–26; “Skat Man,” pp. 27–29; “One Bead at a Time” pp. 31–33]
5. EdNah describes some Navajo celebrations. What were they like? What did the people do? How does EdNah feel about them?
[“Feast,” pp. 39–41; “Skip Dance” pp. 43–45]
6. How were the children disciplined at the Indian Schools? What does this tell you about the treatment of Native Americans in the early 1900s?
[“Testimonial,” pp. 47–49; “Apache Girls” pp. 111–113]
7. Why do you think EdNah’s father insisted she go to the Phoenix Indian School?
[“Valley of the Sun.” pp. 53–59; “Journey Home” pp. 123–126]
8. What does the title of the story “Killing the Indian” mean?
[“Killing the Indian” pp. 61–65]
9. Many of the stories tell about life at the Phoenix Indian School. How does this life differ from yours? List at least six ways.
[“Killing the Indian” pp. 61–65; “Bugle Calls,” pp. 67–68; “Inspections” pp. 69–73]
10. Why do you think the students worked at so many jobs at the Phoenix School? How were the children taught?
[“The Work Details” pp. 75–83]
11. What tone does the author use in “Holy Ghost”? Why? How does it reflect her feelings about these memories?
[“Holy Ghost” pp. 85–90]
12. What kinds of outings did the students have? What were they supposed to learn? How did they behave?
[“Black Eyes, Bangs, and Braids,” pp. 91–94; “Wrigley Mansion,” pp. 107–110; “Lola, Lola, Coca Cola” pp. 115–119]

13. Why do you think there was a separate Indian Day at the Arizona State Fair?
[“Arizona State Fair” pp. 95–99]
14. What are some of the ways that the students showed defiance toward the rules and rule keepers at the Phoenix Indian School? Why do you think they acted that way?
[“Killing the Indian” pp. 61–65; “Holy Ghost” pp. 85–90; “Old Thunder” pp. 101–102]
15. Why did EdNah and her friends enjoy visiting the Wrigley mansion? Why do you think the Wrigleys liked having the children there?
[“Wrigley Mansion,” pp. 107–110]
16. How did her time away at school deepen EdNah’s appreciation of her people and their ways?
[“Journey Home” pp. 123–126; “Beauty Way” pp. 127–130]
17. What were some important things that EdNah learned from her stay at the Phoenix Indian School?
18. Which stories of the book did you find amusing? Which ones were sad? What parts of the book were poetic?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EdNah New Rider Weber "Wolf Clan Woman," is a respected Native American elder and storyteller. She was born into the Skidi band of the Pawnee Nation and raised on the Crown Point Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. Weber has traveled all over the United States sharing stories of her childhood and life. She is also a gifted beadworker whose work has been recognized internationally and is featured in Lois Sherr Dubin's preeminent North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment. Weber lives with her family in Tucson, Arizona.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Richela Renkun is a graduate of New York University, where she majored in the performing arts. She brings her film and theater background to her photographic storytelling. Photographing Native American subjects holds a special place in Renkun's heart, and she has been honored by the Lakota with her own Indian name, "Loves Her Horses Woman." Renkun lives with her family and their horses in Vermont.

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BookTalk with EdHah New Rider Weber and Richela Renkun

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