

A Day No Pigs Would Die Study Guide

by Andrew Clausen

For the novel by Robert Newton Peck



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Synopsis

Wandering up on the ridge above his family's farm, Robert Peck comes across a neighbor's cow having difficulty giving birth. Acting quickly, Rob is able to help the cow give birth to two bull calves. He is rewarded by the neighbor, Mr. Tanner, with a piglet of his own to raise. Rob names the pig Pinky and puts his energy into caring for her. He expects Pinky to be a brood sow and provide many more pigs for the family.

Twelve-year-old Rob is the only surviving son in his family. His four older sisters have all married and left home. Rob's father, Haven Peck, a quiet, gentle man, butchers pigs, a job he does not enjoy but performs so he can provide for his family. Mr. Peck cannot read or write, but stresses the importance of education to his son. Although the family is not rich, Mr. Peck says they are rich in the things that truly matter: they have each other, they have land to work, and they have God's creation to enjoy.

In the fall of the year, Rob's father becomes concerned when Pinky shows no signs of going into heat. After some unsuccessful attempts to breed her, Rob faces the prospect that his brood sow may be barren. Pinky's fate becomes more obvious when winter sets in. Food becomes scarce, and Rob knows what has to be done to provide for the family. "That's what being a man is all about, boy," his father tells him. "It's just doing what's got to be done."

A Day No Pigs Would Die is the story of a tender relationship between a father and son—a boy in the process of becoming a man.

Chapters 10–12

Vocabulary:

For each of the following underlined words, write the function it fills in the sentence (noun, verb, adjective, or adverb) and then define it according to how it is used.

1. “And if you don’t want to spend it, you can squirrel it away.”
Part of speech: _____
Definition: _____
2. And Mr. Tanner was as proud of that brace of grays as he was of Bob and Bib.
Part of speech: _____
Definition: _____
3. Until Mr. Tanner gave me a healthy prod in the backside with his goad and said, “Git!”
Part of speech: _____
Definition: _____
4. “That’s meet and right,” I said.
Part of speech: _____
Definition: _____
5. “Papa,” I said, “why do folks weasel a dog?”
Part of speech: _____
Definition: _____

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5. What is the purpose of “weaseling” the dog? What happens to Ira Long’s dog? How do Rob and his father react to what has happened? What does this tell you about them?
6. What about Pinky worries Rob’s father?
7. When Rob says he wants to grow up to be just like his father, Haven Peck says, “I wouldn’t wish that on a dead cat.” Why does he respond this way? What does he want for his son?
8. Read the following passage from the book:

“Try an’ try,” [Papa] said, “but when it comes day’s end, I can’t wash the pig off me. And your mother never complains. Not once, in all these years, has she ever said that I smell strong. I said once to her that I was sorry.”

“What did Mama say?”

“She said I smelled of honest work, and that there was no sorry to be said or heard.”

What does this dialogue tell you about Rob’s mother?

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9. When Rob offers to quit school to work on the farm, how does his father react? What does his reaction tell you about how he values education?

10. What do you think the last paragraph of Chapter 12 reveals about what Rob is feeling?

Dig Deeper:

11. When Rob is leading Bob and Bib in the ring at the fair, he says:

It was sinful, but I wanted the whole town of Learning to see me just this once. If only Edward Thatcher could see. And Jacob Henry, and Becky Tate.

Read Proverbs 11:2 and 29:23, Romans 12:3, and Galatians 6:4, 5. How was Rob feeling? Is there anything wrong with his attitude?

12. When Rob feeds the squirrel to the chickens, he ponders how the larger hens get all the food and the scrawny ones get nothing. He concludes that it's not a fair world. What law of nature is being demonstrated in this scene? Is nature "fair"? Explain your answer.

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13. In contrast to nature, is God fair? Consider Job 34:12; Psalm 34:19; Ecclesiastes 9:11, 12; and John 16:33. Where can we find hope to get us through this life?

14. When Rob tells his father that he *needs* a store coat, Haven says:

“So do I. But one thing to learn, Rob, is this. *Need* is a weak word. Has nothing to do with what people get. Ain’t what you need that matters. It’s what you do. And your mother’ll do you a coat.”

What is Rob’s father saying about being in want? What is he saying about providence? How is *need* a weak word?

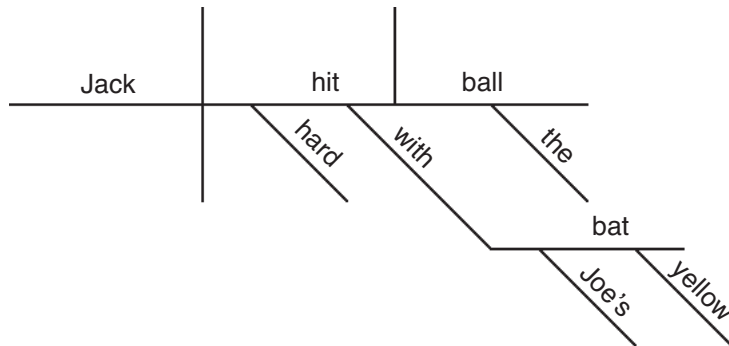
15. What is Haven’s attitude toward his own death?
16. Read Psalm 49:15, Daniel 12:2, John 11:25–27, and 1 Corinthians 15:13–22. What is your attitude toward your own death? What is the promise of Jesus for those who die believing in him?

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from that old witch, they said, would mildew silage and peel paint.” He reasons that the person must have really been a Baptist.

6. He said it looked like a hill of barbwire. Rob must think it’s some sort of incantation: “I wasn’t about to make sport of it. Aunt Carrie always said that only the foolish defy the Dark Spirits.”

7. A diagram of the sentence should be similar to the one below. *Jack* is the subject, *hit* is the verb, and *ball* is the object.



Dig Deeper:

8. Haven Peck is saying that the value of a man shouldn’t be based on whether he can read or write, but what he can do. He also upholds being debt-free and getting by with simple, functional things. (“They do not care that my coat is sturdy and keeps me warm.”)

9. He knows how a capstan works, how to make one, and how to make use of it. He knows Shaker Law from memory. He says that he can “true a beam” to build the barn and make his rows of corn “straight as fences.” He knows that it’s not necessary to season fresh wood if it’s going to be used in outdoor construction.

10. Answers will vary.

11. Haven Peck says that the family has each other, the land to tend, the ox to work for them, the cow to give them milk, and the rain to wash up in. They also have the beauty of nature. The verses from Matthew indicate that the treasures we store up should not be worldly things. The things we need for this life will be provided by God. We should simply seek God first and foremost. In that the family has the things they need for life, they are indeed “rich.”

Topics for Further Study:

1. The principle by which a capstan works is the principle of the wheel and axle. A handle is attached perpendicularly to the axle, acting as a lever (a second-class lever to be more specific). The axle is the fulcrum and the force is applied to the handle, turning the axle and thereby winding the chain around it. The greater the distance from axle to the point at which force is applied to the handle, the less the force needed to turn the axle and wind the chain. Consequently, the greater the distance the slower the axle turns. This is the same principle that governs the operation of a screwdriver, steering wheel, or wrench.

2. True Shakers live celibate, unmarried lives. They live together in large communal homes. There are no Shaker families composed of a mother, a father, and their children. The author apparently had not done his research on Shakers when he decided to make the “fictional” Peck family members of that sect. But regarding Haven’s response about believing “most” Shaker laws, if we believe a set of