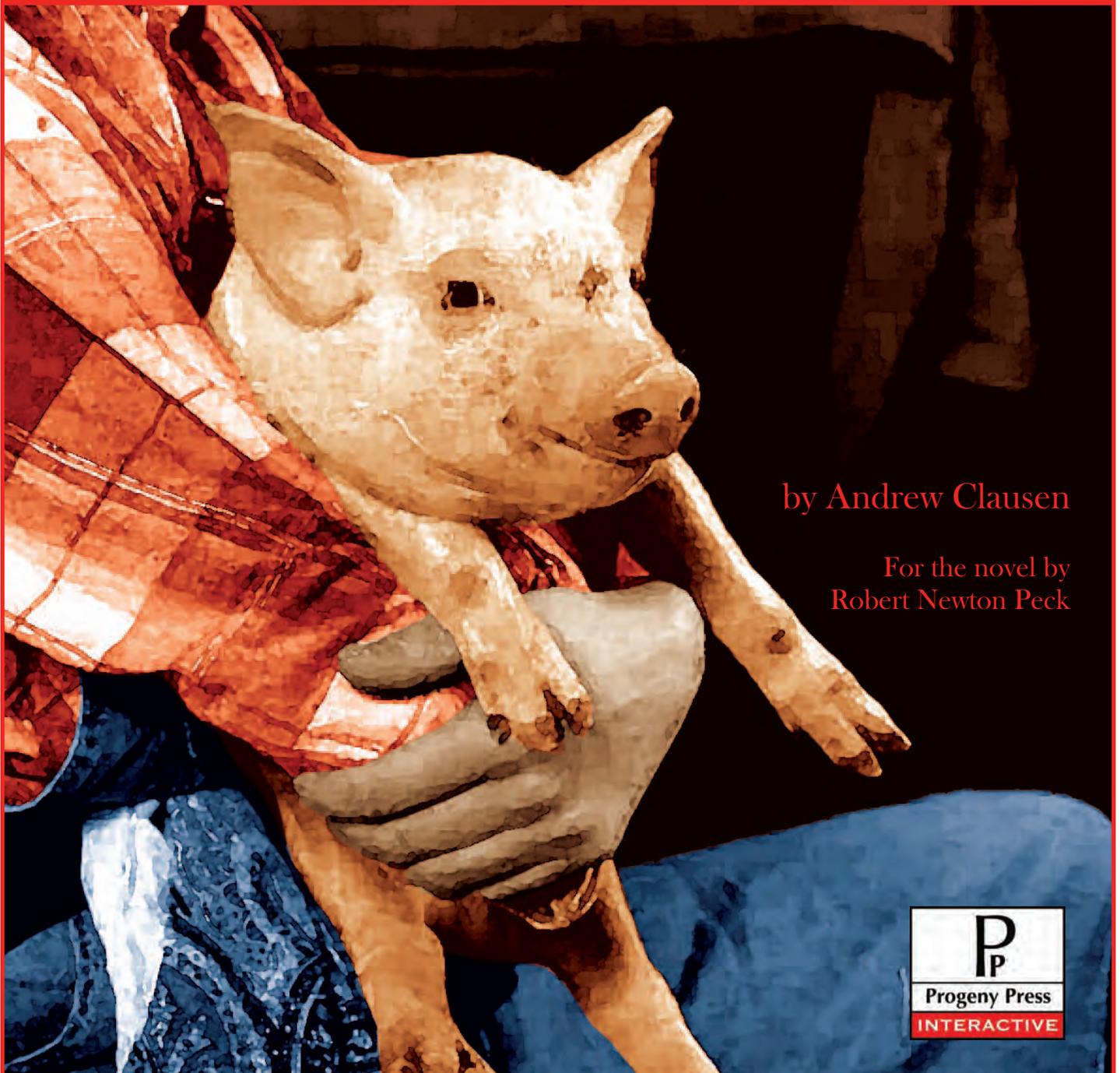


A Day No Pigs Would Die Study Guide



by Andrew Clausen

For the novel by
Robert Newton Peck



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?

Answer Key

Note: Most of the questions in Progeny Press study guides deal with students' understanding and interpretation of issues in the novel; therefore, most answers will be individual to the student. Progeny Press answer keys are designed to be as inclusive as possible for the teacher and/or parent, giving enough background and information to judge whether the student has grasped the essence of the issue and the question. We try to point out some directions students' answers might take, which directions might be best, and some errors that may appear. Students are not expected to answer as completely as the answers provided in the Answer Key.

Chapters 1–3

Vocabulary:

Part 1: 1. esophagus, throat; 2. an enlargement of the thyroid gland; 3. woven cotton material; 4. corn and lima beans cooked together; 5. scented hair oil; 6. a digging tool similar to a pick with one pointed end and one flat end with a sharp edge; 7. an archaic plural form of cow.

Part 2: Accept reasonable responses. 1. made fun of, teased about; 2. physically attack, hit, punch; 3. like a pig being butchered; 4. make him feel sorry, or do him harm; 5. got a hold of, held on to; 6. perhaps from "I'd be tarred and feathered," but attaches a negative meaning to the following phrase, in this case "I'm not going to run away from one more thing"; 7. perhaps connoting the idea of a long wait for Christmas, in this case Rob was hanging on as if he had to hang on until Christmas; 8. large amount; 9. carried; 10. want to or like to.

Questions:

1. When Edward Thatcher made fun of Rob's clothes, Rob got angry and ran away from school.
2. Rob does not stop and consider whether he should help the cow, but immediately does all he can to help it give birth. These verses indicate that it is right to help animals in trouble.
3. Not only does Rob get pulled through the "prickers" and get a backside full of thorns, but he gets his arm badly bitten removing the lump from Apron's throat. He also gets beaten up pretty badly by the cow's hooves while being dragged across the countryside.
4. Rob's father told him he deserved punishment for skipping school. He didn't punish him but reminded him of the importance of an education. He didn't say much about Rob's helping the cow, but gave him spruce gum and a sumac whistle. His actions make it appear that Rob's father was proud of him.
5. Besides working on his farm, Rob's father butchers pigs.
6. Answers will vary. Rob's father means that with fences up there is less opportunity for a dispute among neighbors.
7. Haven Peck says "it's not the Shaker Way to take frills for being neighborly." He says Rob only did what any neighbor would do for another and doesn't require payment. Answers will vary. Mr. Tanner switches tactics and calls the pig a late birthday gift, and finally calls it payment for Haven's help in yoking the newborn bull calves in the coming fall.
8. Rob is happy. She is the first thing he has ever really wanted and could call his own. He immediately begins to notice how pretty the pig is.