

# BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

## thematic connections

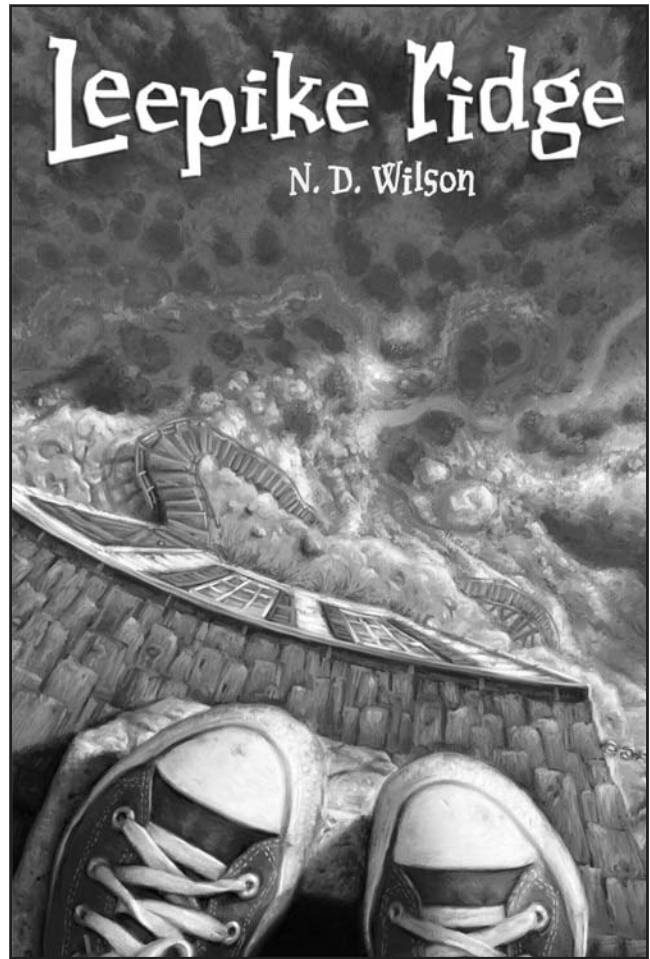
**Survival • Perseverance  
Hope • Friendship  
Acceptance**

**Grades 3–7**

## about the book

**After 11-year-old Tom Hammond gets lost in a series of underground caves, he must survive long enough to figure a way out of the labyrinth and back to his mountain home before the villainous treasure hunter who murdered his father can do the same to his mother.**

Tom Hammond's odyssey of survival and self-discovery begins when he decides to turn a piece of packing foam into a raft. Angered that his mother might remarry just three years after the mysterious death of his father, Tom decides to try out the raft on the river that runs near his mountain home. The river's powerful current drags him under the nearby ridge and deposits him in a series of caverns that connect to mysterious rooms and tunnels. There Tom meets a man who has survived in the caves for three years, a faithful dog, and rooms of ancient treasure. Tom and his new companions must discover a route out of the caves in time to save his mother from a band of murderous treasure hunters. In the process, Tom discovers the true story of his father's death and the key to his own identity.



Random House HC: 978-0-375-83873-6 (0-375-83873-2)  
GLB: 978-0-375-93873-3 (0-375-93873-7)

**An original mix of *Robinson Crusoe*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *The Odyssey*.**

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## pre-reading activity

*Leepike Ridge* is chock-full of allusions to two of N. D. Wilson's favorite novels: *The Odyssey* and *Tom Sawyer*. Like these tales, *Leepike Ridge* is the story of journey, survival, and self-discovery.

Introduce allusion as a literary device. Then, read excerpts from each classic story that are relevant to *Leepike Ridge*, so that students will recognize many of the allusions as they read the text. (One obvious allusion is that both Tom Hammond and Tom Sawyer are trapped in caves that hold treasure.)

# thematic connections

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**Survival**—Reg has remarkable survival skills. Discuss how these skills help Reg survive underground for three years. Cite examples of both Tom's and Reg's ingenuity.

In chapter six, Tom realizes that the water level has risen and that he must leave the beach before he drowns. Have students re-read pages 71–77. Discuss how Tom's survival instinct and will to live deliver him to Reg.

In his treasure room, Reg keeps items that he has found in his net. He says, "Most of this stuff isn't that useful, but what hasn't kept me alive has kept me sane." (p. 125) Discuss what Reg means by this statement. Why is it so important to "exercise" one's mind?

**Perseverance**—As Tom descends into the watery mountain, he fights with all of his strength to survive the fall. "He stopped counting the collisions. Shin, shoulder, skull, and knuckles, ribs all throbbed. His numb mind ignored them. He was still alive and that is all that it would process: life, one breath at a time." (p. 23) Discuss how this idea of living, one breath at a time, helps Tom in his journey. How can you apply this idea to your own life?

**Hope**—Elizabeth refuses to accept that Tom is dead. On pages 25 and 114, how does Elizabeth demonstrate hope that her son is still alive?

How are the Crazy Berry juice boxes that Tom and Reg drink during their first meal together a symbol of hope? In chapter fourteen, "Crazy Berry," Tom and Reg drink the last two boxes while sitting atop the chimney. At this point in the story, what do you think the juice boxes symbolize?

**Friendship**—Have students re-read pages 134–136. How does the experience that Ted and Reg go through together demonstrate an unyielding friendship? How does Tom and Reg's experience surviving in the caves and eventually finding a way out forge a solid bond between them?

Although Phil pretends to befriend Elizabeth, how do his actions give him away? What does he do and say that show him to be a false friend?

**Acceptance**—In chapter nine, Tom learns the truth about his father's death. Reg says, "Tom. After three years down here, I've not learned too much. But one thing I do know is that our bellies aren't big enough for revenge. It turns sour and eats you up." (p. 137) How does this advice help Tom accept his father's death and move beyond his initial need for revenge?

# connecting to the curriculum

**Language Arts**—N. D. Wilson was greatly inspired by both Homer's *The Odyssey* and *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. Most of the characters' names are allusions to characters in these classic adventure stories. For example, Tom is named for *Tom Sawyer*, and Cy is an allusion to Cyclops. Have students use the Internet to research the characters in *The Odyssey*. Challenge them to identify the allusions connected to each character's name in *Leepike Ridge*. (According to the author, the character of Pook is not an allusion based on *The Odyssey*).

On Ted Hammond's grave mound, Reg inscribed the words: *In the ground, the best seed is never wasted.* (p. 130) Ask students to write a journal entry explaining what this sentence means to them.

**Social Studies**—While underground, Tom and Reg discover an ancient tomb that houses a sarcophagus and other anterooms filled with carvings of animals, ancient script, broken pottery and other artifacts. Reg believes that the tomb and its contents are either Phoenician or Chinese. Give students time to research one of these ancient cultures, focusing on tombs and what artifacts would commonly be placed inside of them.

Reg is a historian and is very knowledgeable about ancient inventions. He builds a water clock so that he can keep track of the days. Have students choose an ancient culture, such as Egyptian, Chinese, or Greek and research its inventions. Students can report their findings to the class.

**Math**—Reg keeps track of his days underground by carving Roman numerals into a wall. (p. 122) Introduce or review roman numerals. Discuss how these numbers are still used today.

**Art**—Inside the caves, Tom and Reg discover ancient sculptures in the form of animals. Show students examples of animal art, specifically sculpture, from history. Examples might include the Lion's Gate at Mycenae, the Great Sphinx of Egypt, or animal totems that appear in some Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest. Help students work as a team to design and create a large-scale animal sculpture.

## vocabulary/ use of language

Personification is the literary device of describing inanimate objects with human qualities. There are many excellent examples of personification in *Leepike Ridge*, such as "The whispers and conversations of moss disputing with grass over some soft piece of earth, or the hummingbirds snoring." (p. 17) Challenge students to identify additional examples of this device in the story. (Other examples can be found on pages 18, 191, and 218).

Ask students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from the context. Such words may include: *constricting* (p. 72), *infestation* (p. 101), *harrumphed* (p. 106), *veneer* (p. 111), *ballast*, (p. 113), *grisly* (p. 118), *gloated* (p. 132), *detonation* (p. 133), *sarcophagus* (p. 221), *excavation* (p. 221), *anticlimax* (p. 222), and *cuneiform* (p. 223).

## related titles

### by theme

#### **Downriver**

**Will Hobbs**

Friendship • Survival

Laurel-Leaf paperback

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#### **The River**

**Gary Paulsen**

Survival • Self-Discovery

Yearling paperback

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Laurel-Leaf paperback

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Delacorte Press hardcover

978-0-385-30388-0 (0-385-30388-2)

GLB

978-0-385-90221-2 (0-385-90221-2)

#### **The Adventures of Tom Sawyer**

**Mark Twain**

Survival • Self-Discovery

Children's Classics hardcover

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## about the author

N. D. Wilson is a Fellow of Literature at New Saint Andrews College, where he teaches classical rhetoric to freshman. He is also managing editor for *Credenda/Agenda* magazine, a small Trinitarian cultural journal. He lives in Idaho with his wife and four children. *Leepike Ridge* is his first novel for young readers.

## internet resources

### **Kidipede—History for Kids!**

[www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/literature/odyssey.htm](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/literature/odyssey.htm)

Kidipede is a history Web site for children.

This page gives an introduction to Homer's

*The Odyssey*.

### **Wikipedia**

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave)

This page from the free encyclopedia provides detailed information on caves.

### **Hidden River Cave**

[www.cavern.org/hrc/hrchome.php](http://www.cavern.org/hrc/hrchome.php)

This is the Web site of the American Cave Museum.