



Marguerite Henry's
Misty of Chincoteague

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



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MISTY OF CHINCOTEAGUE



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QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>Misty of Chincoteague</i> by Marguerite Henry ISBN-10: 1416927832 ISBN-13: 978-1416927839
Plot	Paul and Maureen work hard to earn money to buy the wild Phantom and her colt Misty, but learn that living things can never really be owned.
Setting	Chincoteague Island off the coast of Virginia. Pony Penning Day. Paul and Maureen's childhood.
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul and Maureen Beebe, adolescent children• Grandpa and Grandma Beebe• Mr. Foster and his son Freddy• Mr. Jones, the fire chief• Mr. Maddox, the leader of the roundup on Pony Penning Day• The Pied Piper – a wild stallion who masters the Phantom• The Phantom – the object of Paul and Maureen's affections• Misty – the Phantom's foal
Conflict	Man vs. Man Man vs. Nature Man vs. Himself
Theme	Coming of Age Sacrificial Love Wild vs. Tame Freedom
Literary Devices	Onomatopoeia Assonance Alliteration Simile/ Metaphor Personification/ Anthropomorphism

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



Where does this story happen? Does the story happen in the country or the city? (1b)

This story happens in a small country town on Chincoteague, an island four miles off the coast of Virginia. Chincoteague is only seven miles long and averages 21 inches above sea level. Also important to the story is Assateague Island, an outrider island protecting Chincoteague from the Atlantic Ocean. This island is 33 miles long and is a wildlife refuge for geese, ducks, and the wild pony herd that is central to the story.

What is the mood or atmosphere of the place? Is it cheerful and sunny or dark and bleak? What is the weather like? (1d,e)

The town where this story happens is a friendly little place where there is a lot of community spirit and involvement. People know each other and look out for each other. The family in the story is happy and the children are loved and well-trained. It takes place in a part of the country where winter is short and summer lasts long, which adds to the sunny feeling of the story. Only one storm happens during the story, as only a few “storms” happen in the lives of the generally happy characters.

Is the setting a real or an imaginary place? (1g)

This book is based on a true story. Chincoteague Island and the Beebe family really exist, and the events in the story all really happened. The author compiled, rearranged, and edited all the information to make a strong story line. Pony Penning Day still happens every year!

Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class and how do they live? (1h)

The people in this story are middle class, small town folks. There are two basic groups: the horse people and the water people. Everyone seems to have a place in the community and there is harmony. The conflicts in the story come about because of circumstances or inner turmoil rather than social problems in the town.

How long a period of time does the story cover? (2b)

This story takes place over about a year and a half. It begins in early spring with Paul and Maureen anticipating Pony Penning Day. They begin to earn money to buy the Phantom. It ends a little after the next Pony Penning Day at the end of July when they have raced the Phantom, won the race, and decided to set her free. This passage of time represents a big change in their level of maturity.

In what time of life for the main character do the events happen? Does setting the story in this particular time of their lives make the story better? (2e)

The book doesn't tell us exactly how old Paul and Maureen are, but we can tell that they are young people on the verge of growing up. Having been well trained, they are both responsible and respectful of their elders. Still, they struggle to be free to make their own decisions and want to be considered old enough to do so. Early in the story they indulge the childish fantasy of wanting desperately to own a wild thing, a desire common to man. Their despair when these plans go awry and the horses are bought by someone else is typical of youth. Youth's inexperience breeds impatience and fear that our dreams will never come true. Placing this conflict at this time of life with the intense passion of youth, faced with uncontrollable circumstances, makes great story material.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about (3a-c)

The main character, or protagonist, is Paul Beebe, a boy on the edge of manhood. He has a younger sister, Maureen, who is his constant companion and sidekick. Other characters in the story include:

Grandpa Beebe, the person most important to Paul since his father is gone

Grandma Beebe, the one who does the child-training

Mr. Foster and his son, Freddy, who buy the horses then sell them

Mr. Jones, the Fire Chief, who is in charge of Pony Penning Day

Mr. Maddox, the leader of the roundup and Paul's authority on Pony Penning Day

The three main horses are also characters:

The Pied Piper – the wild stallion

The Phantom – the wild mare and the object of Paul's affection and dreams

Misty – the Phantom's foal

What do the characters look like and what adjectives describe them? (3d,f)

Paul is a carefree young boy with an intense longing in his heart to own the wild pony named Phantom. He is industrious and determined, traits shown by his labor, by which he earns the money to buy the horse in only four months. He loves and respects his grandparents, his elders, and his sister. He feels deeply and passionately about his life. He obeys authority, a quality which helps him find the Phantom on Assateague.

Maureen is Paul's younger sister and constant companion. She joins him wholeheartedly in his pursuit of the Phantom. She also works hard to earn the money they need. Smart and resourceful, she shows spunk when she and Paul have to decide who will ride the pony in the big race. She chafes at the restrictions placed upon her because she is a girl.

Grandpa Beebe is a spry, loving surrogate parent to the two young protagonists. He owns a horse ranch, a good home for the children. Grandpa speaks with an accent and is very colorful. He talks about the “whiskers” in his ears. He loves to tease the children and hold them in suspense. He seems gruff sometimes, but they know he has a heart of gold. He is very involved in their lives and feels their pain and their triumph.

Grandma Beebe is a strong, kind woman who loves the children and is very concerned about their well-being. She reminds them to do their chores, eat right, get enough sleep, and be careful. This is sometimes frustrating to them since these things aren’t as important to them amidst their more exciting pursuits. They respect her, though, and sometimes Grandpa rescues them.

The Pied Piper is the stallion on Assateague Island. He is the leader of the herd of wild ponies and Misty’s sire. He is completely wild and wants Phantom for himself. He never gives up calling to her after her capture, trumpeting across the channel. Because of his opposition to Paul’s desire to own the Phantom, the Pied Piper is an important antagonist in the story.

The Phantom is the mare from Assateague Island and the Pied Piper’s mate. Misty is her foal. Her name is symbolic of her nature, for she has avoided capture in three previous round-ups. In trying to discourage Paul from his fantasy of catching her, Grandpa says he’s not sure whether she really exists or is imaginary. She is a combination of wind, light, and shadow.

Misty is the Phantom’s foal. Since she is captured as a foal, she is never really wild. Her spirit is free, but she adjusts to being tamed and is happy with the children.

What do the protagonists think is the most important thing in life? (3m)

At the beginning of the story, Paul and Maureen think the most important thing in life is owning the wild pony, Phantom, and her foal, Misty. They go through an agonizing disappointment when they catch them only to lose them again in auction to Mr. Foster and his son Freddy.

Do the character’s priorities change over the course of the story? (3n)

Once Paul and his sister achieve their goal, they find owning the Phantom to be less important than they thought. Having secured the two horses and won the yearly race with the Phantom, Paul’s thoughts turn to the needs of his horses. Misty seems happy enough with him and his family, yet Phantom remains restless. A longing haunts her features. When the ocean sings its storm songs, Paul can sense Phantom’s longing to crash into it, to become one with the wild elements once more. Paul cannot rest in his ownership of Phantom when she herself doesn’t want to be owned. Soon Paul’s love for Phantom overrides his desire to possess her, and he sets her free.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



What does the protagonist want? Is he trying to capture something? (5a,d)

There are two things that Paul wants more than anything. He wants to be considered grown up by his grandpa and the men in the town, and he wants to capture and own the wild pony, Phantom. These two desires have conflicting implications, of course. You might ask whether Paul can have both at the same time.

Does he attempt to overcome a physical obstacle outside of himself? (5c)

There are several physical obstacles that Paul has to overcome in order to own the Phantom. First, he has to catch her! He is old enough now to ride on the round-up crew, so he has a chance. The Phantom has quite a history of evading capture, however. (Have students find these examples in the book.)

Even if Paul manages to capture the Phantom, other obstacles bar his way. For instance, he has to buy her from the Fire Department, which means he has to find ways to make the \$100 fee. (You might talk about the ways that Paul and Maureen earned the money to buy the ponies.) Finally, in order to buy the Phantom, Paul has to be the first to offer the fee. As it turns out, Mr. Foster buys the Phantom before Paul and Maureen have the chance to make their offer.

Is the conflict also an internal one? (5e)

Paul also faces internal conflicts in this story. He is full of the intense passion of a young person wanting something desperately and being afraid that he won't get it. When he finds out that Mr. Foster has already bought the ponies he has worked so hard to get, his disappointment is nearly unbearable. This is a great place in the story to discuss similar feelings your students may have had. The girls might identify with Maureen's frustration about being left out just because she is a girl.

Paul also struggles with the need to be obedient to authority when he would rather make his own decisions, an experience common to every young person coming into adulthood. Paul has to obey Grandma when she wants him to eat, sleep, slow down, and stay home when the storm is threatening. He has things he wants to do and thinks her worry insignificant. He has to obey Mr. Maddox, the round-up leader, when he asks him to go after a stray even though he thinks the detour will put him out of the race for the ponies.

In a way, these struggles with authority foreshadow Paul's climactic decision to free the Phantom. In each case, Paul gets a little practice at denying his own immature impulses for the sake of more grown-up priorities. His decision to let Phantom go back to the wild is a kind of culmination of this process.

Why can't the protagonist have what he wants? Does geography, his age, or other people stand in his way? (6a,d,f)

There are definitely factors that stand in Paul's way of getting what he wants: the fact that he is young and must submit to his elders rather than do exactly as he pleases; the fact that the horse he wants does not want to be caught and is very canny about avoiding capture; and the fact that other people are involved in all the events. These things conspire against Paul. Since Mr. Jones, the Fire Chief, doesn't know that Paul wants the Phantom, he sells her to Mr. Foster. Likewise, Mr. Maddox, the leader of the round-up, doesn't know that Paul desperately wants to catch her; he sends him to round up a straggler, essentially taking him out of the main action.

Are there other things in the story that distract the characters from their main goal?

It seems as if everything conspires to distract Paul from his main goal of capturing the pony. The responsibilities of being part of the family and doing his daily chores take time. Grandma's insistence on his taking care of his health is distracting. The need to make money in order to buy the pony if she can be caught takes time. Natural circumstances like the storm also distract him from his goal, which makes him think the horses are lost.

Is the protagonist involved in more than one conflict? What are the conflicts? (7c; 6g,h,k)

In the story, Paul's first conflict is with nature (Man vs. Nature). He wants to capture a wild horse. The horse doesn't want to be captured. Nature assists her resistance in the form of the wind and sea, her own elusiveness, and a storm.

In addition to nature, Paul has to deal with several people whose desires and actions oppose him: Grandma Beebe wants him to do his chores; Mr. Jones, the Fire Chief sells the horses to Mr. Foster; Mr. Maddox, the leader of the round-up sends him to get strays; and Mr. Foster buys the ponies first (Man vs. Man).

Finally, Paul, after accomplishing his first goal of capturing and owning the ponies, has to decide whether to keep them or let them go free (Man vs. Himself).

What major events take place in the story as a result of the conflict? (8a)

Paul and Maureen want to capture and own the Phantom, who doesn't want to be caught.

Paul is old enough to ride in the round-up this year, but has to obey the leader.

Paul captures the Phantom because she has a foal, Misty, and can't run away.

Misty almost drowns in a whirlpool during the round-up, but Paul saves her.

Mr. Foster buys the ponies before Paul can get to Mr. Jones to pay for them. Paul despairs.

Mr. Foster's son Freddy wins the raffled sorrel pony and likes her better than the Phantom; so he sells Phantom to Paul. Paul and Maureen are ecstatic.

Paul and Maureen spend the next year training the ponies.

They race the Phantom in the next year's big race and she wins. Paul and Maureen rejoice.

The Phantom is not happy in captivity and keeps hearing the Pied Piper calling to her across the water.

Finally, Paul realizes that she needs to be set free and lets her go.

Misty is happy in captivity; she is content to stay with the Beebes.

The Beebes realize they have a future in Misty and her eventual offspring.

What events form the climax of the story? Does the protagonist solve his own dilemma? (9d-e)

The climax of the story occurs when Paul, riding the Phantom on the beach, hears the Pied Piper calling to the Phantom from across the channel. Phantom's response causes Paul to face a fact that he has known all along: the mare longs to be free. Paul finally just turns her loose. Grandpa and Maureen initially try to stop him, however, when Grandpa realizes Paul's intentions, he is proud. Paul makes this decision within himself without talking about it with the others. This shows his growing maturity. Only a truly mature person sacrifices his own desires for another's best interest.

Were you satisfied with how the story ended? If not, why not? (10b)

This is a great discussion question. For instance, some of your students might not be ready to make a mature decision like Paul did. Perhaps they will be sad that he let the pony go. Others might have an example of how they have faced a similar choice and made a mature decision.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



Does the resolution of the story offer a particular understanding of the story's themes? (10f)

The Coming of Age theme becomes clear as Paul's original desire to own the wild thing (a youthful desire) changes into a desire to set the wild thing free (a more mature desire). Paul had an opportunity to set the pony free when he first found her on the island. She was hindered by having a new foal and couldn't move fast enough to get away from him. He decided to capture her. Later, he decides to free her, showing growing maturity.

What does the protagonist learn? Is he changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story? (11a)

Paul is definitely changed by what happens to him in the story. He learns to wait and be patient. He learns to cooperate as he partners with Maureen and perseveres in his work to capture the ponies, buy them, and train them. He also learns the satisfaction of laying down his own desires for the good of another. His desire to own the wild horses, even when it comes to pass, is not as fulfilling as letting the Phantom go free and seeing her joy in getting what she wanted most. Other things Paul learns that your students may notice include the importance of working toward a goal and obeying your elders.

What do other characters learn? Are they changed? (12a)

Maureen also learns cooperation as she helps Paul in reaching their goals. She is a great partner in the enterprise. Although dismayed at first when Paul lets the Phantom go, she comes to realize the wisdom of his decision. She happily continues with the next project concerning Misty. Grandpa perceives that Paul is maturing just as he and Grandma had hoped he would. His warm words, "Ye done the right thing, children," underscore the value of Paul's good judgment.

What is the main idea of the story? Does it deal with a universal theme like the ones listed in this syllabus? (13a)

Tracing Paul and Maureen's growth in character and maturity, the story presents a classic coming of age theme. As Paul and Maureen mature, the author develops other themes as well such as submission to authority, the wild beauty of nature, and the joy of sacrificial love.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE



Does the author use the sounds of our language to create interest in her story? (14)

This story is rich in the use of the sounds of language to create interest.

Onomatopoeia (14a)

- The wind “hissed” and “spat”
- Misty “galumphed” across the marsh
- The thunder “crackled” and “thundered”
- Music “wheezed” a noisy mockery

Assonance (14c)

- A flash of tails and manes
- Creating curious urgings

Alliteration (14e)

- Suddenly the galleon shuddered...the ship struck a shoal.
- They sucked in the sharp sweet pungence of pine...and the enticing scent of salt grass.
- The color of copper with splashes of silver.
- Bush, briar and bog
- He cut a quid of tobacco instead of a “chaw” of chocolate.
- The chief clasped and unclasped his cane.
- The rain stopped, the sun broke through in softly slanting rays.
- The Phantom was free of stalls that shut out the smell of pines and the sound of the sea.

Does the author use the words “like” or “as” in making comparisons between two or more dissimilar things? (16d)

The story is full to the brim with wonderful similes, especially those pertaining to horses:

- The boy’s hair fell over his brow like the forelock of a stallion.
- Maureen did a quick little leap, like a colt bucking.
- Grandma Beebe had soft little whiskers about her mouth like the feelers of a very young colt.
- The kids galloped around the table nosing the Grandparents like a curious colt.
- Paul threw back his head like a spirited horse and let out a loud whinny.

There are other similes in abundance, too. You could have students look for them and find them on nearly every page. For instance:

- Grandpa’s voice was as strong as a tow rope for Paul.
- Paul followed Mr. Maddox like the wake of a ship.
- The colts were close packed like oysters in a barrel.
- The air quivered like a violin string, then suddenly snapped.
- Grandpa’s arms were gnarled and upraised like a wind-twisted tree.

Do creatures speak with human voices, expressing rational thoughts and ideas? (16f)

The creatures in this story don’t actually speak, but the humans attribute words to them. Grandpa “heard” the Phantom say to buy Grandma a toaster with the money she won in the race. When the Phantom was set free to go with the Pied Piper, she looked back as if to say, “Take care of my baby. She belongs to the world of men, but I belong to the isle of the wild things.” At the end of the story, Paul “heard” Misty say, “I’m Misty of Chincoteague.”

Does the author use metaphors, calling one thing or object another? (16i)

There is a great description in the first chapter comparing the sea to a wildcat stalking a galleon which goes on for several pages. It is also a great example of personification.

- The sea became a wildcat...the galleon her prey.
- She stalked the ship, drove her off course, slapped her, knocked her spars out.
- The wildcat sea yawned, swallowed men...then the sea became a kitten.

Other metaphors include:

- At one point, Grandpa became a microphone translating the story of Misty’s fight to survive the whirlpool.
- The colts in the pen are children lost and scared.
- Misty is a silver fluff of shadow.
- The Pied Piper’s ringing neigh speared the morning stillness as he came to get Phantom.
- The sun was a huge, red balloon hovering over the bay.
- The wind was calling the Phantom.
- She was a piece of thistledown borne by the wind through space.
- Maureen was the Phantom, she was Paul, she was the winner of the race.

Does the author provide any clues early in the story of things to come in the plot? (17a)

Here are some instances of foreshadowing in the story:

On the round-up, the men tease Paul about not being much good because he’s so young. Paul replies “hotly” that he’d do most good where the leader tells him to go. Later, the leader sends him off into the boonies to round up a stray, which seems to put him out of the race, but actually leads him to the Phantom.

When Paul finds the Phantom with a new foal, he feels guilty because he knows she doesn’t want to be caught. He could let her go free right then. He rationalizes that he will buy them both so they won’t be separated.

On Pony Penning Day, all the ponies are dejected except Misty. She is skipping and dancing and joyful. She liked Chincoteague! She felt “at home.”

As Mr. Foster shared his problem of having too many ponies, the tired look suddenly lifted from the fire chief’s face.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT



Who is the author? When did she live? Did she suffer any hardships in her life that might have made her think or feel a certain way about her subject? (18f; 20a)

Marguerite Henry was born Marguerite Breithaupt in 1902, the youngest of five children. Her father, a successful editor, kindled a love for books in 5-year-old Marguerite with a Christmas gift of a writing desk, tablet, and pencils. Marguerite was glad for these the following year when rheumatic fever confined her to her bed. This confinement continued for six years. Since Marguerite missed the outdoors and her animals, she penned furry companions to keep herself company.

Marguerite sold her first story to a women's magazine when she was only eleven. This was the first of what would be many published pieces. In fact, Mrs. Henry published 58 books before her death in 1997 at age 95. Three of these, *Misty of Chincoteague*, *King of the Wind*, and *Justin Had a Horse*, received various Newbery Awards.

Marguerite's love for animals, particularly horses, lasted throughout her lifetime and became the subject of her many children's books. Each of these was based upon some real animal and child.

Was the author happy or unhappy? Did she have a family? (18d-e)

Although Henry enjoyed a long and loving marriage to Sidney Henry, the two were childless. Nevertheless, she has delighted two generations of children with the wholesome fruit of her fertile imagination.

Henry conceived of Misty's story when she attended Pony Penning Day on Assateague Island in 1947. There she met the Beebe family and the colt Misty. Although Grandpa Beebe was initially apprehensive about selling Misty to Henry, he agreed on the basis that she would write his grandchildren into her book. This she did with spectacular results. She retained the colt's true parentage and story throughout the piece, making Misty a work of historical fiction. The children live, immortal as their pony, within the pages of her book.

NOTES:

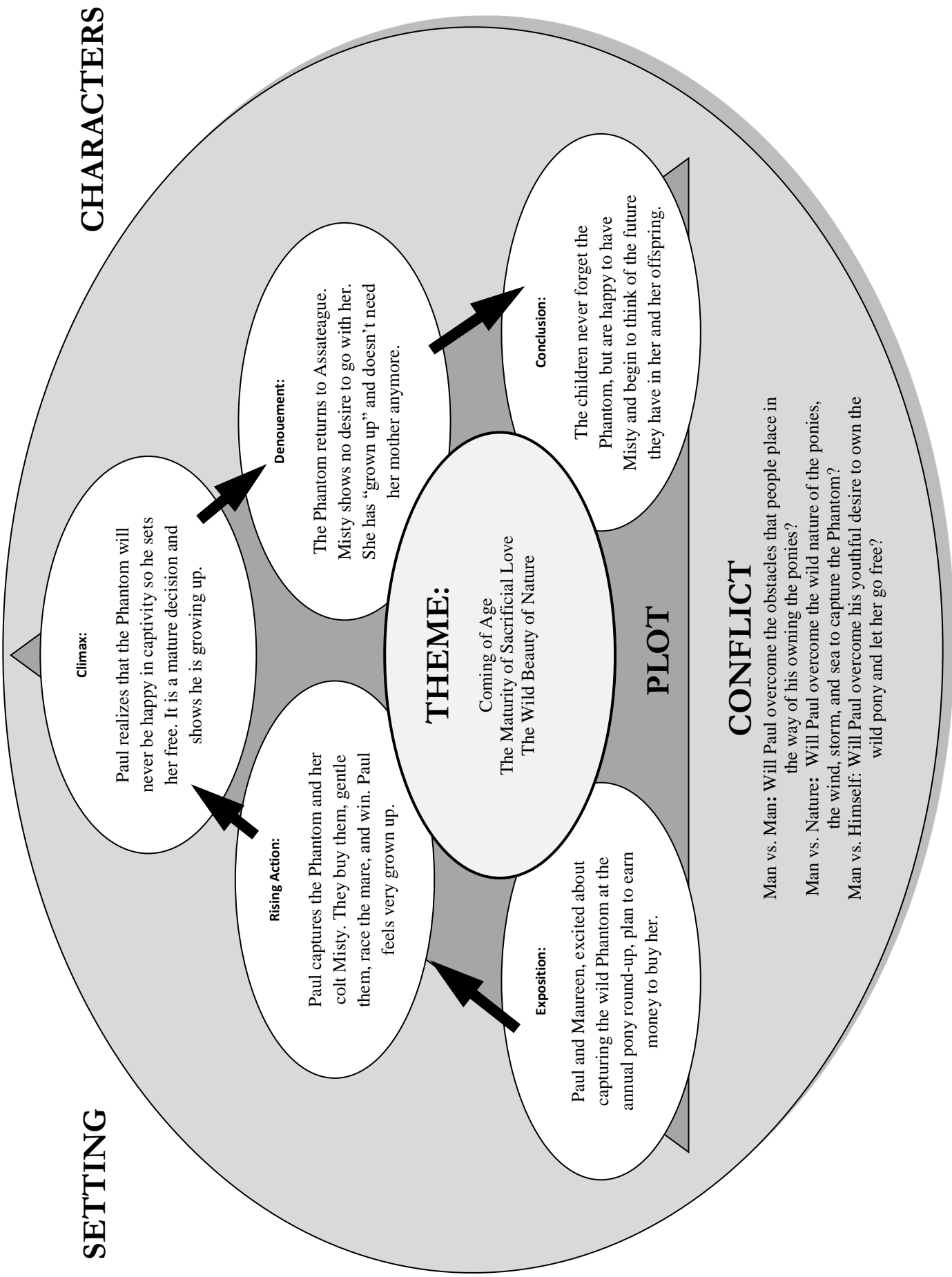
STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Misty of Chincoteague by Marguerite Henry: Story Chart



SETTING

CHARACTERS

Climax:

Paul realizes that the Phantom will never be happy in captivity so he sets her free. It is a mature decision and shows he is growing up.

Rising Action:

Paul captures the Phantom and her colt Misty. They buy them, gentle them, race the mare, and win. Paul feels very grown up.

Denouement:

The Phantom returns to Assateague. Misty shows no desire to go with her. She has "grown up" and doesn't need her mother anymore.

THEME:

Coming of Age
The Maturity of Sacrificial Love
The Wild Beauty of Nature

Exposition:

Paul and Maureen, excited about capturing the wild Phantom at the annual pony round-up, plan to earn money to buy her.

Conclusion:

The children never forget the Phantom, but are happy to have Misty and begin to think of the future they have in her and her offspring.

PLOT

CONFLICT

Man vs. Man: Will Paul overcome the obstacles that people place in the way of his owning the ponies?

Man vs. Nature: Will Paul overcome the wild nature of the ponies, the wind, storm, and sea to capture the Phantom?

Man vs. Himself: Will Paul overcome his youthful desire to own the wild pony and let her go free?

Misty of Chincoteague by Marguerite Henry: Blank Story Chart

