

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

by

James Fennimore Cooper

James Fennimore Cooper was the first American novelist to earn international acclaim. He was a wealthy, landed, gentleman who did not begin to write until he was thirty. He developed a style similar to Sir Walter Scott and is best known for his *Leatherstocking Tales*, five novels about the North American Frontier.

The Last of the Mohicans, the second novel in this series, is an historical romance. This genre was well developed by Scott in his novel *Ivanhoe*, for example. The historical romance portrays great conflict with love and adventure, set in a past that is idealized. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the obvious conflict is between the French and the English over control of North America and, the more basic conflict, between the white man and the Indian.

The story begins with Magua, an Indian runner, who has agreed to lead Colonel Munro's daughters, Cora and Alice, and Major Heyward to Colonel Munro at Fort William Henry. By Colonel Munro's orders, Magua was once flogged for drunkenness. This was such a deep insult to the Indian that he is motivated throughout the story by revenge and his character dominates as the villain.

Instead of leading the party to the fort he proceeds to get them lost in the woods in order to betray them. Fortunately, they meet Hawkeye and his Indian companions, Uncas and Chingachgook, the last of the Mohican tribe, who come to their aide. The first half of the novel is about the attempts of this party to reach Colonel Munro at Fort William Henry. The last half of the novel has to do with the attempts of Hawkeye, Heyward and Uncas to rescue the Colonel's daughters from Magua, who has succeeded in capturing them.

Written in 1826, the wording of *The Last of the Mohicans* may be a little difficult to understand. Try finding an edition that has footnotes.

Unit Study Suggestions:

1. Research the history of firearms. When were they first used?
2. Make a booklet about rifles. Draw and write a short description of each. Share this with a younger friend or sibling who is interested.
3. Plan a camping trip for the family. Cook your meals over an open fire.
4. If possible, go on a canoe ride. If you sit in the back you can practice guiding the canoe.
5. Find out what Indian tribes lived in the New England area. Draw a map of the area. Assign a symbol to each tribe, placing the symbol on the territory occupied by them.
6. Find out more about the author, James Fennimore Cooper. Your library should have a set of books exclusively about American authors. Ask the Librarian how to use it.
7. Practice a dramatic reading of a passage of the book.
8. Choose a portion of dialogue in the book that is different than the way we talk today. Rewrite it in today's English.
9. Learn the different parts of a hymn book. If you don't have one, borrow one from your church.

10. If you have an archery range or shooting range in your area, plan a visit and try target shooting.
11. Define prejudice. Find evidence of prejudice in the book.
12. Write a character description of each of the main characters.
13. The characters and situations in Cooper's novels have been criticized as being unrealistic and unbelievable. Compile some examples that you feel support this position in *The Last of the Mohicans*.
14. *The Last of the Mohicans* is the second in the Leatherstocking Tales series. You might enjoy reading the others: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). They all tell of the frontiersman, Natty Bumppo, otherwise known as Leatherstocking, Deerslayer, Hawkeye, La Longue Carabine, or Pathfinder.
15. In chapters 12, 19, and 22, Hawkeye gets involved in theological discussions. Read these portions and write a summary of his religious beliefs. Write how you would answer him.
16. Investigate the literary terms *novel* and *romance*. Make a chart with headings for novels, romance, and non-fiction, listing the titles of books you have read during the last few months or begin keeping a record now. How are you spending your reading time? What can you learn from this?