

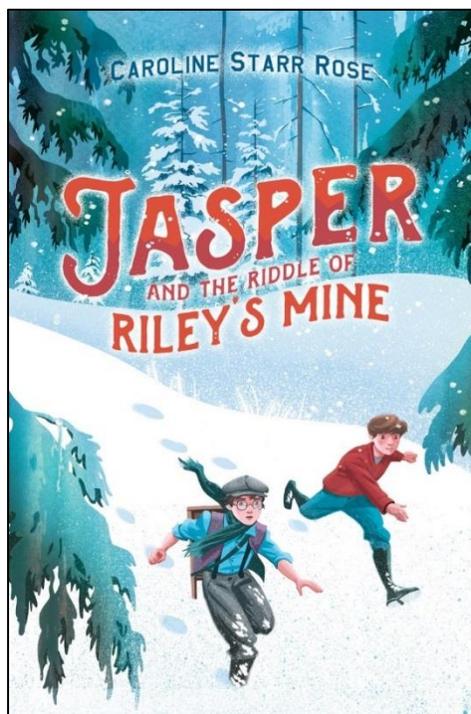


Penguin  
Random House  
PENGUIN YOUNG READERS

# DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY GUIDE

## Teaching Notes by Caroline Starr Rose

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### CONTENTS

Page 2	Background / About the Author
Page 3	Praise for <i>Jasper and the Riddle of Riley's Mine</i> / Pre-Reading Activities
Page 4	Vocabulary List / Helpful Links / Themes
Page 5	Discussion Questions
Page 6	Digging Deeper



## BACKGROUND

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Desperate to get away from their drunkard of a father, eleven-year-old Jasper and his older brother Melvin often talk of running away, of heading north to Alaska to chase riches beyond their wildest dreams. The Klondike Gold Rush is calling, and Melvin has finally decided the time to go is now—even if that means leaving Jasper behind. But Jasper has other plans and follows his brother aboard a steamer as a stowaway.

Onboard the ship, Jasper hears a rumor about One-Eyed Riley, an old coot who's long since gone, but is said to have left clues to the location of his stake, which still has plenty of gold left. The first person to unravel the clues and find the mine can stake the claim and become filthy rich. Jasper is quick to catch gold fever and knows he and Melvin can find the mine—all they have to do is survive the rough Alaskan terrain, along with the steep competition from the unscrupulous and dangerous people they encounter along the way.

In an endearing, funny, pitch-perfect middle grade voice, Caroline Starr Rose tells another stellar historical adventure young readers will long remember.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Caroline Starr Rose is an award-winning middle grade and picture book author whose books have been ALA-ALSC Notable, Junior Library Guild, ABA New Voices, Kids' Indie Next, Amazon's Best Books of the Month for Kids, and Bank Street College of Education Best Books selections. In addition, her books have been nominated for almost two dozen state awards lists. In 2012 Caroline was named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start Author for her debut novel, *May B*. She spent her childhood in the deserts of Saudi Arabia and New Mexico and taught social studies and English in four different states. Caroline now lives with her husband and two sons in New Mexico.



## PRAISE FOR JASPER AND THE RIDDLE OF RILEY'S MINE

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Junior Library Guild selection

Amazon Best Books of the Month: Ages 9-12 (February 2017)

The brothers' struggle to survive the Yukon wilderness with its harsh beauty and unforgiving cold will keep readers entranced.

— Kirkus Reviews

[A] rousing historical adventure . . . Highly recommended for fans of adventure and historical fiction, or as a classroom read-aloud.

—School Library Journal

Jasper's voice and Caroline Starr Rose's writing style brought her characters alive, bursting with warmth and spirit. The rich details and historically accurate setting took me back to the era of the Gold Rush.

— Terry Lynn Johnson, author of *Ice Dogs* and *Falcon Wild*

Jasper and the Riddle of Riley's Mine takes two brothers and plunks them right into a hair-raising journey to the goldfields of Canada. It's a rollicking adventure, warm and funny, chockablock with bad guys and good guys, mysteries and deceptions, dangers and disasters. With courage and persistence, Melvin and the delightful Jasper discover the true meaning of riches, friendship, and family. It's a rip-roaring tale and a romping good read. Try to resist!

— Newbery Award-winning author, Karen Cushman

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

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1. Study the cover of *Jasper and the Riddle of Riley's Mine* and make predictions about the story, the setting, and Jasper himself based on what you see.
2. Watch the video [Off to the Klondike! The Search for Gold](#) or [Klondike Gold Rush](#) and record 3-5 facts you've learned.
3. Journal / pre-write: What's the longest trip you've ever taken? Where did you go? How long did it take you to get there?
4. Examine the map called [Routes to the Klondike](#), focusing on the Skagway/Dyea route that ran from Seattle to Dawson City. Jasper and Melvin Johnson travel the 2,000 miles of the Skagway/Dyea route by steamship, raft, and on foot. The journey takes them six weeks. How does this compare to your longest trip?



## VOCABULARY LIST

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1. steamer / steamship
2. washboard
3. union suit
4. prospector
5. Sourdough
6. saw pit
7. portage
8. greenhorn / cheechako
9. cache
10. claim

## HELPFUL LINKS

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[Off to the Klondike! The Search for Gold](#) (3:38 video) :: WatchKnowLearn.org  
[Klondike Gold Rush](#) (9:08 video — heads up: brief mention of prostitution) :: WatchKnowLearn.org  
[Front Page of the Seattle-Post Intelligencer for July 17, 1897](#) :: Wikimedia Commons  
[Routes to the Klondike](#) :: Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park  
[Ton of Goods](#) :: Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park  
[The Mounties: The Force in the North](#) :: Virtual Museum Canada  
[A visual of the Chilkoot Trail](#) :: National Park Service  
[“The Spell of the Yukon” by Robert Service](#) (poem)  
[“The Cremation of Sam McGee” by Robert Service](#) (poem)  
[“To Build a Fire”](#) by Jack London (short story)  
[Shopping in Seattle for Supplies](#) (lesson plan) :: National Park Service  
[Panning for Gold!](#) (lesson plan) :: National Park Service

## THEMES

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1. truth vs. misinformation, exaggeration, or deception
2. selfishness vs. selflessness
3. family, home
4. wealth, riches, security
5. broken promises vs. keeping your word



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe what you think Jasper's home life is like. What details has the author included to give you this impression?
2. Why is it so important to Jasper to go to the Klondike? What does it represent for him?
3. What are some promises, kept and broken, in the story? Why do you think keeping promises is so important to Jasper?
4. For a time it's unclear what's happened to Jasper's mother. Mel says in the first chapter that she's died, but when Jasper speaks of her, he says she's left or gone away. When did you realize Jasper was trying to fool himself? Why do you think he does this?
5. In chapters 5, 7, and 9, Jasper dreams about what he'll do when he finds gold. What would you do if you struck it rich? How are Jasper's dreams different than yours? Why do you think that's the case?
6. How does Jasper change over the course of the book? How does Mel? Give examples to support your answer.
7. Robert Service wrote a number of poems about the Klondike gold rush experience. Read his poem "[The Spell of the Klondike](#)," paying special attention to the first, second, and last stanzas. How are Jasper's feelings about the Yukon similar? Support your answer with examples from the text.
8. Melvin and Jasper don't always get along, but the brothers truly love each other. How do you know this is true? How does their relationship change over the course of the story?
9. Melvin talks about the Miner's Code, where "Everyone kept an eye out for each other and helped when they could." Which characters exemplify the Miner's Code? Which don't? Can you think of any character(s) whose actions toward the end of the book might be described as following the Miner's Code, if even in a flawed way? Support your answer with examples from the text.
10. **Spoiler! Read at your own risk!** One-Eyed Riley's mine worth millions was actually an elaborate hoax. Why did Riley bother playing such a trick? What does this teach us about his character? What do Frank and Jasper's responses to Riley's trick show us about their true selves?



## DIGGING DEEPER

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1. Explore more of Robert Service's Yukon poetry. "[The Cremation of Sam McGee](#)" is a humorous take on the harsh cold in this part of the world. Try your hand at your own humorous Klondike poem.
2. Author Jack London [sailed for the Klondike a few weeks before the Johnson boys](#). His most famous book, *The Call of the Wild*, was set in the Klondike. Read the short story "[To Build a Fire](#)" and see how unforgiving the northern climate can be. Compare and contrast "To Build a Fire" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee," considering tone, mood, setting, theme, and word choice.
3. Plan a trip to the Klondike! [Have students "shop" in Seattle for their ton of goods](#) (a lesson courtesy of the National Park Service).
4. [Pan for gold](#) (a lesson courtesy of the National Park Service).
5. Write a letter or keep a journal: Imagine you're traveling the Skagway/Dyea route, like the Johnson boys. Write a letter home to your family or keep a journal, mentioning three places you stop along your route. What do you see? Whom do you meet? What do you learn and experience in each place? How long does it take to reach Dawson City?
6. Make sourdough bread like a true Sourdough! Send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the address below for free sourdough starter. [Here are some recipes to try](#).  
Oregon Trail Sourdough  
P. O. Box 321  
Jefferson, MD

