



Note: This guide was written using the Little, Brown edition, ©1971. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

This story tells a lot about Navajo life and customs as well as relationships between family members. It is about a young girl who is having a hard time dealing with the knowledge that her grandmother is going to die. The girl (Annie) and her grandmother have a very close relationship. They do many things together.

There are even times when Annie feels that her grandmother is Annie's age. Annie is reluctant to begin the transition into the adult world, as shown by her unwillingness to begin weaving with her mother.

One day, Grandmother calls the family together and says that when the "new rug (which Annie's mother is weaving) is taken from the loom," she will "go to Mother Earth," meaning that she will die. This news triggers a crisis for Annie, who sets out to prevent her mother from completing the rug, in hopes that doing so will delay Grandmother's death. The first thing she does is to misbehave in school, thinking the teacher will have to send for her mother and father. She takes her teacher's shoe and puts it in the trash can. Another teacher sees her do this and returns the shoe to the teacher, and the plan backfires when the first teacher regards it as a harmless prank and does not send for her parents. Next, she lets the sheep out of their pen, thinking her mother and father will have to round them up, but she and her grandmother are able to do it. Finally, she gets up in the middle of the night and proceeds to pull out the strands of yarn from the rug. On the third night of doing this, she is interrupted by her grandmother, who explains that it is impossible "to hold back time," and that death is as natural as the sun coming up in the morning and going down in the evening.

After her conversation with her grandmother, Annie achieves acceptance of the cycle of life and is better able to cope with Grandmother's impending death. She

realizes her grandmother will always be a part of the earth. With her new understanding, she is now ready to take her place at the loom with her mother and help to weave the rug with the weaving stick that had once belonged to her grandmother.

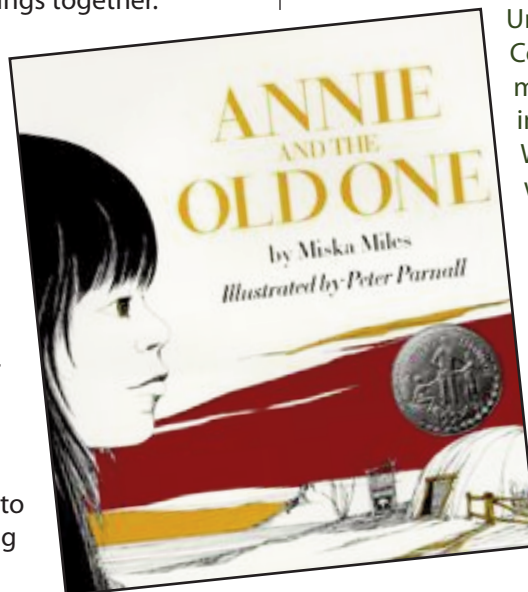
Author Sketch

Patricia Miles Martin was born November 14, 1899, in Cherokee, Kansas. She attended the University of Wyoming and San Mateo College. In the 1930's she was an elementary school teacher for four years in Denver, Colorado, and Armito, Wyoming, before moving to California with her husband, Edward R. Martin.

Ms. Martin started writing almost by accident. In 1957, while attending San Mateo College, she enrolled in an upholstery class that was too full. She noticed that another class had empty seats, so she sat down. It was a creative writing class, and there was room for her. *Sylvester and the Voice in the Forest* (1958) was her first published book.

Ms. Martin began a story with a thought or message she wanted to convey, usually a value she lived by and wanted to share with her readers. Research was very important to her, and she spent time carefully working out all of the details first. She often traveled to a particular region and studied how her story would develop based on the surroundings of the area and how it related to her story.

During her lifetime, Ms. Martin wrote over 100 stories under her own name and the pseudonyms Miska Miles, Patricia A. Miles, and Jerry Lane. She wrote biographies of famous Americans, and fiction stories about different cultures, people, and animals. Her inspiration came from the things that happened to her while living on a farm in Kansas and a Navajo reservation. In 1972, she received a Newbery Honor and a Christopher Medal for *Annie and the Old One* (1971). Along with many others she wrote, this book was also named an ALA Notable Book and a Junior Literary Book, and was on the *Horn*



Annie and the Old One Miska Miles

Book honor list. *Annie and the Old One* was adapted as a film and released by Greenhouse Films in 1976. Ms. Martin died in San Mateo, California, in 1986.

Critic's Corner

A simple, poetic tale about the inevitability of death and its place in the cycle of life, *Annie and the Old Ones* garnered much critical praise and remains a popular children's picture book. A Newbery Honor Book, American Library Association Notable Children's Book, and Christopher Award recipient, the tale was called "an unforgettable story" by *School Library Journal*. *Publishers Weekly* wrote of the story: "Many writers ... have tried to present the concept of death to children; Miska Miles has done it with this wise story of a Navajo girl and her grandmother."

Timeline

Beginning	Annie, a nine- or ten-year-old Navajo girl, lives in a traditional Navajo home with her mother, father, and grandmother. She especially loves helping Grandmother and listening to her stories.
Later	Grandmother tells Annie it is time for her to learn to weave, like her mother, but Annie isn't ready yet.
Middle	Grandmother tells the family that she will go to the earth (die) when the rug Annie's mother is weaving is taken off the loom (finished).
Still later	Annie, not wanting to accept Grandmother's impending death, tries various means of slowing the weaving process.
End	Grandmother explains to Annie that time cannot be held back; using examples from nature, Grandmother teaches Annie that death is part of the cycle of life. Finally, Annie, having had a revelation of her own place in the cycle and achieving acceptance, takes up the task of helping to weave the rug.

Selected Other Works by Patricia Miles Martin

The Pointed Brush (1959)
Suzu and the Bride Doll (1960)

Kickapoo (1961)
The Raccoon and Mrs. McGinnis (1961)
Dusty and the Fiddlers (1962)
The Rice Bowl Pet (1962)
Little Two and the Peach Tree (1963)
See a White Horse (1963)
The Greedy One (1964)
No, No, Rosina (1964)
Pony in the Schoolhouse (1964)
Mississippi Possum (1965)
The Bony Pony (1966)
The Fox and the Fire (1966)
The Pumpkin Patch (1966)
Show and Tell (1966)
Dolls from Cheyenne (1967)
Friends of Miguel (1967)
The Pieces of Home (1967)
Rabbit Garden (1967)
Trina's Boxcar (1967)
Grandma's Gun (1968)
A Long Ago Christmas (1968)
One Special Dog (1968)
Uncle Fonzo's Ford (1968)
Kumi and the Pearl (1968)
Apricot ABC (1969)
That Cat! 1-2-3 (1969)
The Dog and the Boat Boy (1969)
Nobody's Cat (1969)
Eddie's Bear (1970)
Somebody's Dog (1970)
Chicanos: Mexicans in the United States (1971)
Be Brave, Charlie (1972)
Two Plays about Foolish People (1972)
Wharf Rat (1972)
Otter in the Cove (1974)
Chicken Forgets (1976)
Swim, Little Duck (1976)
Aaron's Door (1977)
Small Rabbit (1977)
Mouse Six and Happy Birthday (1978)
Beaver Moon (1978)

Bibliography

"Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database—Literature Annotations,"
<litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=1690>
"Miska Miles," from Children's Literature Network, www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/birthbios/brthpage/11nov/11-14miles.html
"Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database—Literature

Annotations,"

<litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=1690>

"Patricia Miles Martin Papers," University of Southern Mississippi de Grummond Collection, www.lib.usm.edu/~degum/html/research/findaids/martin,pm.htm

"Patricia Miles Martin Papers," The Children's Literature Research Collections at the University of Minnesota, <http://special.lib.umn.edu/findaid/xml/CLRC-776.xml>

Objectives

The student will:

1. gain an understanding of traditional views of death and its role in the life cycle.
2. learn about Navajo culture and family life.
3. analyze relationships of family members with each other and with their environments.
4. compose, make, create or invent something new as a result of having read this book.
5. evaluate or judge information on Navajo family life and/or customs and be able to verify these judgments with documentation.

The Importance of Setting

The setting—a rural home and school on a Navajo reservation in the Southwestern United States—is integral to the story, and underscores the themes of family respect, tradition, and harmony with nature. The positive themes and setting shine through, despite some inaccuracies, as the following commentary in New York University's *Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database* notes: "Admittedly, Peter Parnall's illustrations are stereotypic and inaccurate regarding Navajo culture and tribal life (pot and blanket designs, facial bone structures). Navajo grandmothers would not sit with legs crossed, nor would Navajo children in a traditional setting react to death by acting out (Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Philadelphia: New Society, 1992, 191-192). ... Nonetheless, cherished relationships and possessions as symbols of continuity and solace, natural and symbolic immortality rather than a theologic belief system, and the richness of diversity, are reasons enough to recommend this book."

Cross-Curricular Sources

Film

Annie and the Old One, Greenhouse Films, 1976

Internet

"Miska Miles Teacher Resource File," falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/miles.htm

"*Annie and the Old One* Lesson Plan for 4th and 5th Graders," <
teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-literature/Monica_Jensen.html
"Native Americans/First Peoples," including comparison chart w/European way of life,
<http://www.mrdonn.org/nativeamericans.html>
"Southwest Navajo Indians," <http://nativeamericans.mrdonn.org/navajo.html>

Meaning Study

1. What is the main idea of the very first paragraph? (It describes the beauty, peacefulness, and nearness to nature of Annie's Navajo world.)
2. Give some examples of what it is like where Annie lives. (It is a semi-desert environment, with sand, bluffs in the distance, a low mesa, pumpkins in the cornfield, and corn with tassels.)
3. The main idea of page 4 is that Annie has things to do before she goes to school. Find two facts that tell you this. (She helps watch the sheep; she carries pails of water to the cornfield; she walks to the bus stop.)
4. Explain what Annie does in the evenings. (She sits at her grandmother's feet and listens to stories of long ago.)
5. Explain what is meant when Annie thinks her grandmother seems like a girl her age, no more than nine or ten harvestings. (Sometimes her grandmother acts like a young girl.)
6. Describe how Annie and her grandmother are alike. (They laugh at many of the same things.)
7. What does Annie do before she goes outside? (She touches her grandmother's face.)
8. What do you think this means? (Answers may vary but should include something concerning Annie's love for Grandmother.)
9. What are Annie's mother and father doing outside? (Her father is making a silver necklace and her mother is weaving at the loom.)
10. In the beginning of the story, does Annie help her mother with the weaving? (No, her thoughts wander to other things.)
11. What is the Navajo belief about the coyote? (It is God's dog guarding the hogans of the Navajos.)
12. Why do you think Annie indicates that she is not ready to weave? (Answers will vary, but in general, she is not yet ready to begin growing up and taking her place in the cycle of life.)

Comprehension Study

Discuss the following questions with your students. You could ask students in higher grades to write their answers to the questions in their own words.

1. Explain what Grandmother means when she says she will go to Mother Earth (p. 15).
(She means she is going to die.)
2. Explain why you think the grandmother picks this particular time to call the family together (p. 13).
(Answers may vary, but teachers should include the fact that 1) Grandmother, who understands many things, realizes she will die soon and wants her family to be prepared, and 2) the whole family can be together because they are home at the same time.)
3. Compare this time of day with the time before dinner.
(Before dinner everyone is busy doing their particular jobs.)
4. What does each member of the family choose to have from the grandmother (pp. 15-16)?
(Annie chooses the weaving stick; Annie's mother chooses the rug; father chooses the silver belt with turquoise.)
5. Look at the picture on p. 17. Can you make out any figures in it or pictures of anything?
(Answers will vary. There appear to be a hawk and a coyote.)
6. What does Annie's mother say about her grandmother knowing she will be going to Mother Earth (p. 16).
(She says that Grandmother is one who lives close to all nature, and like many of the Old Ones, she knows many things to come.)
7. Talk about what you think it means to "live in harmony with all nature."
(Answers will vary.)
8. Does Annie accept the fact that her grandmother is going to die (p. 19)?
(No—she wants to prevent it by hindering the completion of the rug, something she believes will hold back time.)
9. Annie makes plans on the bus to school. Retell them in your own words (p. 20).
(She decides she is going to have to be bad so that her mother and father will be called to school; this, she believes, will keep her mother from weaving.)
10. Tell, in order, what happens after she gets to school (pp. 20-22).
(The teacher takes off her shoes to lead the children in exercise. When they are jogging, Annie picks one up and hides it in the trash container.)
11. How is Annie caught (p. 23)?
(Another teacher sees Annie through the window, and he goes outside to retrieve the shoe.)
12. Does Annie accomplish what she wants by doing something bad (p. 24)?
(No, the teacher accepts her actions as a harmless joke and does not call her parents.)
13. What is Annie's next trick (p. 28)?
(She releases the livestock from the pen so they will get lost and have to be rounded back up.)
14. Explain how Annie keeps the bell on the lead goat quiet (p. 28).
(She puts her fingers across the bell to muffle the sound.)
15. Who discovers that the sheep are missing (p. 32)?
(Grandmother.)
16. Does Annie's trick accomplish what she had hoped (p. 32)?
(No.)
17. Who goes after the sheep and brings them back (p. 32)?
(Annie and her grandmother.)
18. The next night, Annie tries something different to stall the weaving of the rug. Describe it (p. 36).
(She goes to the rug her mother is weaving and pulls out many strands of yarn so the rug will have to be rewoven.)
19. Describe, in order, what happens the next two nights (p. 38).
(The next night she undoes more weaving, and on the third night, she is caught by Grandmother.)
20. Explain how Annie feels after Grandmother talks to her the next morning (p. 41).
(She realizes that death is a natural part of the life cycle, not something to be feared, and that nothing she can do will keep her grandmother alive when the time comes for her to die.)

21. What does Grandmother mean when she says, "You have tried to hold back time"? Give examples (p. 41).
(Answers will vary; in general, Annie has tried to delay the completion of the rug, which Grandmother has given as the sign of her impending death.)
22. How do we know that Annie accepts her grandmother's death (p. 42)?
(Annie goes back, picks up her weaving stick, and tells her mother she is now ready to weave.)

Across the Curriculum

1. Show how you can use this story to help you (or a friend) deal with the death of a family member.
2. Tell how the story would be different if the main characters were not Navajo. Could the story be changed to reflect another culture? Would it still make sense?
3. Make finger puppets and act out part of the story.
4. Go to the library and find a book on Native American games or dances, then give a demonstration of one.
5. Write the differences between the house in which Annie lives and the one in which you live.
6. List the good things about Annie.
7. Suppose the character of Annie were a boy instead of a girl. How do you think the story would have been different?
8. Create a poster to advertise this book so that students will want to read it.
9. Design your own rug. Weave it with yarn (or paper if yarn is unavailable). Make it colorful.
10. Do you think Annie's grandmother explains death to her in a way that would be understood today? Why or why not?

Vocabulary Test

Choose one of the words from the list below and write it on the line in front of its correct definition. (2 points each)

gnarled
dawdled
trudged
crept

Navajo
turquoise
skittered
loom

wandered
shivered
shrilly
tassels

herded
shallow
solemn

- _____ 1. knotty, full of knots; twisted
- _____ 2. One of a tribe of Indians mostly living on reservations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah
- _____ 3. moved about without direction; strayed
- _____ 4. united together; made to go the same way
- _____ 5. wasted time; went slowly
- _____ 6. a bluish-green stone very popular in the Southwest
- _____ 7. trembled; shook from cold or fear
- _____ 8. not deep
- _____ 9. walked or marched wearily
- _____ 10. skipped along or glided lightly or hurriedly
- _____ 11. sharply; in a way that is piercing to the ear
- _____ 12. serious; sometimes gloomy
- _____ 13. movee along close to the ground; moved slowly on hands and knees
- _____ 14. a frame or machine used for weaving
- _____ 15. tufts of corn silk hanging from an ear of corn

Comprehension Test

True/False (2 points each)

In the blank before each sentence, write **T** if the sentence is true, and **F** if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Annie is a Plains Indian of the southwest.
- _____ 2. Annie has chores to do before school.
- _____ 3. Grandmother tells Annie stories of times long ago.
- _____ 4. Annie and her grandmother do not get along together.
- _____ 5. Annie's mother tries to make her learn to weave.
- _____ 6. The coyote is known as "God's Dog" to the Navajo and he guards the hogans.
- _____ 7. Annie does not want to take anything from her grandmother.
- _____ 8. Annie does not understand how her grandmother knows she will die when the rug is finished.
- _____ 9. Annie always misbehaves in school.
- _____ 10. Annie skips school the day after her grandmother talks to the family.
- _____ 11. Annie's teacher has yellow hair.
- _____ 12. Annie takes off the lead goat's belled collar so no one will hear the sheep leave.
- _____ 13. Annie and her grandmother bring the sheep back to their pen.
- _____ 14. Annie's grandmother is finally able to help her to accept.

Multiple Choice (2 points each)

- _____ 1. Which of the following words best describes Annie?
 - a. selfish
 - b. loving
 - c. hateful
 - d. mean

- _____ 2. According to the story, what does Annie's father do?
 - a. helps mother weave.
 - b. herds the sheep
 - c. hunts for meat
 - d. makes a silver necklace

- _____ 3. Which sentence best tells the main idea of the first part of the story?
 - a. Mainly background information necessary to the story is presented.
 - b. Annie finds out her grandmother is going to die.
 - c. Annie learns to weave on the big loom.
 - d. Annie misbehaves at school

- _____ 4. How old do you think Annie is?
 - a. seven or eight
 - b. eight or nine
 - c. nine or ten
 - d. ten or eleven

- _____ 5. What happens just before Annie goes outside?
 - a. Annie herds the sheep.
 - b. Annie and her grandmother make dinner.
 - c. Annie touches the wrinkles on her grandmother's face.
 - d. None of the above.

- _____ 6. What does Annie do as she sits beside her mother at the loom?
 - a. She thinks about stories her grandmother has told her.

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- b. She watches her mother weave so that she can learn faster.
- c. She watches her father working.
- d. She tells her mother she is worried about her grandmother.

_____ 7. Why does Annie not want her mother to weave the rug?

- a. Annie wants to play with her mother.
- b. Annie's grandmother will die when the rug is finished.
- c. Annie needs help with her homework.
- d. Annie wants a ride to school.

_____ 8. What is a Navajo house called?

- a. a mesa
- b. a warp
- c. a hogan
- d. a weft

_____ 9. What is the first thing Annie tries in hopes of getting her grandmother to live longer?

- a. lets the sheep out of the pen
- b. takes out some of the weaving
- c. skips school
- d. hides her teacher's shoe

_____ 10. What sentence best supports the idea that Annie is misbehaving on purpose?

- a. She is trying to get her father to pay more attention to her.
- b. She wants a better place to sleep.
- c. She is trying to get her mother not to weave.
- d. She does not like her teacher.

_____ 11. Where does Annie sleep?

- a. on the floor
- b. in her own room
- c. outside under the stars
- d. in a chair

_____ 12. How are Annie and her grandmother alike?

- a. They go to school together.
- b. They both like to weave together?
- c. They like to laugh together.
- d. They both like to play with beetles.

_____ 13. What gift does father want from grandmother?

- a. weaving stick
- b. rug
- c. blanket
- d. silver belt

_____ 14. What happens right before Annie puts her teacher's shoe in the trash can?

- a. She hides the shoe in her dress
- b. Another student tries to take the shoe away from her.
- c. A teacher comes outside and takes it from her.
- d. Girls are giggling.

_____ 15. Why does Annie let the sheep out of the pen?

- a. She wants to be mean.
- b. She wants her mother to look for them and not weave.
- c. She does not like the sheep.
- d. She wants to skip school.

_____ 16. What do you think will probably happen when Annie's grandmother dies?

- a. Annie will not be able to understand it.
- b. Annie will stop going to school.
- c. Annie will remember that her grandmother will always be a part of the earth.
- d. Annie will get mad and break her grandmother's weaving stick.

Essay Questions (5 points each)

1. Retell in your own words how Grandmother explained death to Annie. Do you think this was a good way? Why or why not? Give reasons for your answers.
2. Annie tries several ways to keep her mother from weaving on the rug. Name at least two things that she could have done instead of misbehaving.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY (2 POINTS EACH)

1. gnarled
2. Navajo
3. wandered
4. herded
5. dawdled
6. turquoise
7. shivered
8. shallow
9. trudged
10. skittered
11. shrilly
12. solemn
13. crept
14. loom
15. tassels

COMPREHENSION TEST

True/False (2 points each)

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. F
6. T
7. F
8. T
9. F
10. F
11. T
12. F
13. T
14. T

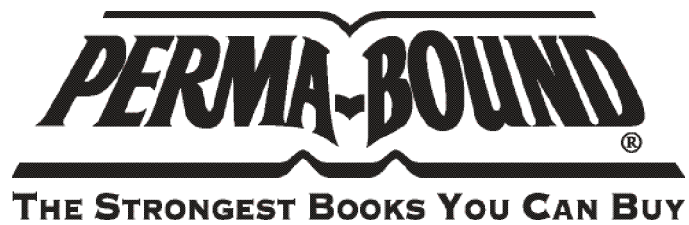
Multiple Choice (2 points each)

1. b
2. d
3. a
4. c
5. c
6. a
7. b
8. c
9. d
10. c
11. a
12. c
13. d

14. a
15. b
16. c

Essay Questions (5 points each)

Answers will vary.



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