



# THE MYSTERY OF MYSTIC MOUNTAIN

Becca Soloway, a twelve-year-old from Connecticut, trades dreams of beach days and popularity for a summer stuck at Far Away Ranch, a no-frills dude ranch in the wilds of Montana. With no spa, no Wi-Fi, and no escape, she's ready to write the whole trip off—until she meets Jon, the wrangler's son. Together, they uncover whispers of a long-buried secret tied to the ghost town of Piney Woods and the legendary treasure of outlaw Pearlhandle Pete. Full of humor, heart, and a dash of ghostly mystery, this story explores friendship, identity, and the unexpected adventures that can change everything.

Written by Janet Fox

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Janet Fox is an award-winning author of middle-grade and young adult fiction known for blending history and mystery into emotionally resonant stories. A former educator based in Montana, she draws deep inspiration from the state's natural beauty and rich heritage. With her background in teaching and her deep Montana roots, *The Mystery of Mystic Mountain* is a perfect fit for Humanities Montana's educational outreach. Fox's quietly magical storytelling invites classroom exploration and thoughtful discussion.



## THEMATIC OVERVIEW

identity || belonging || friendship || self-discovery || family tension || trust ||  
transformation independence || emotional growth || adventure || mystery || historical  
legacy || treasure hunt || rural life || outsider perspective || reconnection change ||  
courage || personal truth || nature's influence || Montana landscape  
paranormal || girl empowerment || community || storytelling || secrets || making peace

## PRE-READING CONVERSATION

*Sometimes the plan changes—and that's when the real journey begins.*

Tell of a time when your plans unexpectedly changed. What feelings did that stir up? What did you learn about yourself in that moment?

*What we see on the surface isn't always the whole story.*

Tell of a time when your first impression was wrong. What changed how you saw things? What hidden trails did you discover?

*Friendship can grow in the unlikelyst of soil.*

Think about a friendship that surprised you. What helped that connection grow? How did your initial feelings change? What brought you together—adventure, challenge, or something unexpected?

*Becoming yourself isn't always easy—but it's worth it.*

Recall a moment when you felt pulled in different directions. How did you figure out what felt true to you?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

*Nothing felt fair, or right, and Becca wanted to push back against the unraveling situation with a red-hot poker (pg. 7).*

- What does Becca risk losing as her summer—and family—unravels? How do her emotions in this moment help us understand what's really important to her?
- Why might anger feel easier than sadness or fear when things fall apart? Have you ever felt like Becca—wanting to push back against something you couldn't control?
- How do Becca's hopes for friendship and belonging shape her reaction to being at Far Away Ranch? What does this moment reveal about her deeper needs—and maybe your own, too?

*Because finding a treasure that was this big, if the rumors were true, would be amazing. So much fun (pg. 57).*

- Why might a treasure hunt feel so exciting to Becca right now? What is she really hoping to find—beyond gold or a famous outlaw's revolver?
- Why do you think Jon shares his secret with Becca—and not someone else? What does this tell us about how trust begins between people who feel alone?
- Have you ever been invited into something secret or special? How did that change your connection with the person who invited you—and with yourself?

*Tad reached down and took it out of her hand before she could stop him... (p. 89).*

- Why do you think Tad takes the canister so boldly in this scene—and what does that moment foreshadow about his role in the story?
- In what ways is Tad a “shapeshifter” character—sometimes helpful, sometimes threatening?
- Have you ever had to figure out whether someone was really on your side? How did your feelings change as you got to know them better—and what did that teach you about yourself?

*That's how Pearlhandle Pete became a changed man and found his partner in all things...” (p. 122).*

- What makes this moment in Pete's story so meaningful to Jon? How does learning about Pete's love and loss shift Jon's understanding of his own grief?
- How might this story within a story help Becca and Jon see their lives differently? What are they each struggling with—and what do they begin to learn about truth, kindness, and connection?
- What do you think it means to “forge a new destiny”? Have you ever had to change your direction or face something hard? What helped you do that?

*“It's not a coincidence. None of it... Like Terry says, it's part of the plan” (p. 215).*

- Why do you think Liam believes everything is “meant to happen”? How does this idea give hope to characters like Jon, Becca, and even Terry?
- What do you think the “plan” really means in this story? How does it connect to Pearlhandle Pete's choice to leave behind more than treasure—to build a future for others?
- Have you ever had something unexpected lead to a positive change in your life? How can believing in a bigger plan help us face difficult moments?

