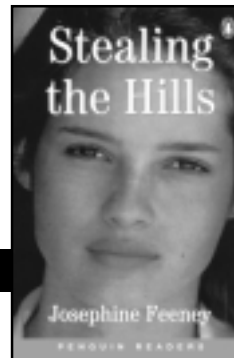


## Teacher's notes

## Stealing the Hills

by Josephine Feeney



## SUMMARY

**S**tealing the Hills is written by Josephine Feeney, an exciting new author of fiction for young teenagers. It is her third novel, and was published in 1997.

*Stealing the Hills* takes place in a beautiful village in the English countryside. The story is narrated by Susan, a teenage girl whose family lives in the village. Her father works in the local coal mine, as do most of the men in the village. However, there is no coal left in the mine, and it therefore has to close, leaving the workers and their families unemployed and depressed.

A rich man, Mr Beech, appears in the village. He tells the trusting villagers that he is going to buy the old coal mine and provide new jobs for the workers. But Mr Beech is in fact an unscrupulous businessman. He buys a beautiful hill next to the village park and starts digging there, looking for more coal. Soon the village is no longer beautiful but black with coal dust. The villagers go to work for him but he pays very badly.

Susan and her friend Julie organize a protest against Mr Beech - they want to get him out of the village. But the businessman is utterly immoral and his dirty tricks really frighten Susan and her family ...

## ABOUT JOSEPHINE FEENEY

Josephine Feeney was born in 1956 in Leicester, England. Her parents had emigrated to England from Ireland during the Second World War, and Feeney grew up in Leicester as one of eight children. She became a teacher and taught English in secondary schools for six years, going on to become a teacher of children with special educational needs.

Feeney spent part of her teaching career working in mining towns, and it is this social environment which forms the background to *Stealing the Hills*. During the 1980s in Britain, many coal mines became uneconomical to run and were closed down, causing serious social problems such as unemployment and the disintegration of village and family life.

Feeney gave up teaching in 1991, determined to make a career as a children's writer. Her first children's story, *My*

*Family and Other Natural Disasters* was published in 1994 and was well reviewed in the national press, as was her second children's novel, *Truth, Lies and Homework* (1996). Feeney lives with her husband and two children in Leicester.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Feeney's novels are about families and their problems. Her first novel, *My Family and Other Natural Disasters*, is about a boy whose parents are divorcing; his father has left home and his mother is distraught - but the boy learns to cope. The newspaper, the *Mail on Sunday*, describes the book as 'sad, funny and disturbingly true to life'. In her second novel, *Truth, Lies and Homework*, a girl discovers a dreadful secret about her old Irish grandfather, and she gets into terrible trouble as a result.

In both novels, Feeney explores the problems of families and of immigration in a way which teenagers can understand. Her stories are lively and entertaining; she maintains tension without ever becoming unrealistic.

## STEALING THE HILLS: THEMES

In *Stealing the Hills*, Feeney's themes reach beyond the family and become broader in outlook. As in the first two novels, there are problems to be solved, but this time the problems are outside the family rather than within it. Here, Feeney tackles some of the very real problems of today's world: unemployment, unethical business people, pollution, and the destruction of the countryside.

Susan, the heroine, courageously decides to challenge Mr Beech, the unethical businessman, despite the opposition of her family and, in particular, of her father. At one level, the story depicts a classic struggle between good and evil, with Mr Beech as the 'bad man'. As in all such stories, Susan, fuelled by her sense of what is right, wins by refusing to be intimidated. It is a classic story, written in a modern context, involving newspapers, reporters and TV programmes.

*Stealing the Hills* is a very exciting novel. Mr Beech is a highly unpleasant character, who gets nastier and nastier

E

1

2

3

4

5

6

ELEMENTARY

STEALING THE HILLS



## Teacher's notes

as the story continues, causing the reader to have genuine fear for Susan and her family. The tension mounts as the story progresses. Teenagers will easily identify with the heroine and at the same time absorb simple but important moral lessons about responsibility.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable *Student's Activities* pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Students work in groups. Photocopy the pictures on pages 2, 15, 20 and 25, with one set of copies for each group. Cut off the captions from the pictures and keep them separately.

Write the opening sentence of the story on the blackboard: 'When I was thirteen they closed the coal mine in our village.' Give each group a set of pictures. Ask students to write a caption for each picture. Then give them the actual captions and ask them to match the captions to the pictures.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1-8

- Teach students the word *manager*. In groups, students role-play a village meeting in which the villagers discuss their feelings about Mr Beech. Assign students the following roles:  
Susan  
Julie  
Susan's mother  
Susan's father  
Mr George  
the supermarket manager  
Mrs Dale  
a mother of young children
- Teach students the word *imagine*. Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following question:  
Imagine that Mr Beech pays his workers well and they are happy in their jobs. Do you think that Susan and Julie are right to be angry then? Which is more important, jobs and money or beautiful hills and fields? Say why you think this.
- Write the titles of chapters 1-8 on the board, but not in the right order. In pairs, students put the chapters in the right order without looking at the book. Then they write a sentence or two explaining each chapter title, ie, they say, 'This chapter is called Getting Away From It All because .....

## Chapters 9-16

- Put students into small groups. Each student in turn has to make a true sentence about one of the following people. If students cannot make a sentence, or if the sentence is untrue, they are 'out' of the game.  
Mr Beech  
Susan  
Julie  
Susan's father  
Mr George  
David North  
Mary North
- Put students into groups of four people. Divide each group into two pairs, pair A and pair B. Pair A writes two or three sentences telling the story of each chapter from 9-12. However, they put their sentences for each chapter in the wrong order. Pair B does the same for chapters 13-16. Each pair then hands their sentences to the other pair who have to put them in the right order for each chapter. They can also correct the other pair's English, if necessary.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Put students into pairs. They discuss the following question:  
How do these people change in the story?  
Susan, Susan's father, Mr Beech
- Put students into small groups. Tell them to look up *society* in their dictionaries. They then choose something that they think is wrong in our society and that they want to change. For example: there are too many cars on the road. Each group writes a five-minute show about their subject and performs it for the class.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1-8

- bribe** (v/n) to say you will give someone money or a present so that they will help you or do something  
**brick** (n) people build houses with these; they are small and square  
**business** (n) that's none of your business! = That's of no interest to you!  
**coal mine** (n) a very big hole in the ground where people work and take out coal (this is black and people use it for fire)  
**dig** (v) to make a hole in the ground  
**hill** (n) a small mountain  
**lorry** (n) a very big, very strong type of car; people carry a lot of things in it  
**meeting** (n) when people meet to talk about something  
**poster** (n) paper with words or pictures on to tell people something; you put it on a wall  
**protest** (n) this is when a lot of people do something because they want to show that they think something is wrong  
**ruin** (v) to hurt something very badly  
**steal** (v) to take something when it is another person's thing  
**own** (v) when you buy something, you own that thing



## Student's activities

Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

- Read the Introduction in your book. Then close your book and put the right words in the sentences.
 

When they close the (i) ..... in Susan's village, everybody is sad. There are no more (ii) ..... Then a rich man called Mr (iii) ..... arrives with a lot of money and a plan to open a new (iv) ..... He has other (v) ..... for the village too. Most of the people in the village (vi) ..... Mr Beech. They are happy because now they have (vii) ..... again. But what is really (viii) ..... ? Susan and her friend Julie know.

Before long there is dirty black (ix) ..... over the village and the (x) ..... of their lovely Country Park. Mr Beech wants to (xi) ..... their lovely village and (xii) ..... their hills.
- Work with another student.
  - What do you think is really happening in the village? How does Mr Beech want to ruin it?
  - What do you think this means: 'Mr Beech wants to ... *steal* their hills'?
  - How do you think Susan and Julie can stop Mr Beech?

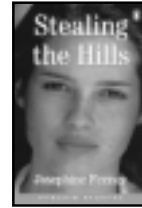
### Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-8

#### Chapters 1 & 2

- Make sentences.
  - People in the village lose their jobs because .....
  - Shops in the village close because .....
  - Susan's father can't find a job because .....
  - Susan's brothers go to Birmingham because .....
  - Susan's mother and father are unhappy because .....
  - Susan and Julie go for walks in the Country Park because .....
  - You can see for miles and miles in the Country Park because .....

## Stealing the Hills



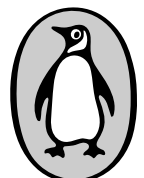
- People like Mr Beech because .....
  - Mr Beech's picture is in the newspaper because .....
  - Mr Beech is going to have a meeting because .....
  - Susan wants to go to the meeting because .....
- Work with another student.
 

*Student A:* You are Susan's father. You go to the bread shop because you want some bread. You talk to Mrs Dale about the village, the coal mine and Mr Beech. What are your hopes for the village and your family? Tell Mrs Dale.

*Student B:* You are Mrs Dale. You work in the bread shop. Susan's father buys some bread from you. Talk to him about the village, the coal mine and Mr Beech. What are your hopes for the village? Tell Susan's father.

#### Chapters 3-5

- Are these sentences right or wrong?
  - At the meeting, a young woman tells people that Mr Beech owns the mine, the supermarket and the hill next to the Country Park.
  - Most people are very interested in Mr Beech's plans.
  - Mr Beech bought the hill because he wants to build a supermarket there.
  - Mr George thinks this will be good for the park and hill.
  - Julie and Susan say that they will try to stop Mr Beech.
  - People like Mr Beech because he brings money and jobs to the village.
  - Mr Beech pays his workers well.
  - The village gets black with smoke from the mine and there are big lorries everywhere.
  - Susan puts posters up in the village.
  - People start to see that Mr Beech is not good for the village.
  - At the protest meeting, Susan and Julie bring dogs.
  - Susan and Julie start to feel afraid of Mr Beech.
- Work with another student. Talk about these questions.
  - What do you think of Mr Beech? Why?
  - 'Before long I was very afraid.' How does Mr Beech make Susan and Julie afraid of him, do you think? What does he do?



## Student's activities

### Chapters 6-8

- Answer these questions.
  - When Mr Beech goes to see Susan, what does he say he will give her?
  - What is Susan's answer?
  - What bad things happen to Susan and her family?
  - Why do these things happen, do you think?
  - Where do Susan and Julie say they will go at the end of Chapter 8? Why?
- Work with another student. Make the conversation between Mr Beech and Susan in Chapter 6.

### CHAPTERS 9-16

#### Chapters 9 & 10

- Who says these things? Who to?
  - 'Whose dog was it?'
  - 'There are more accidents than usual at the new mine.'
  - 'I haven't got a dog.'
  - 'I think Mr Beech told the right story.'
  - 'Before this I was quite angry - but now I'm very angry!'
  - 'Look, Susan, you're in the newspaper.'
  - 'How do you know that it was Mr Beech's dog?'
  - 'I work on the *Evening Post* newspaper.'
  - 'Who told you about my accident?'
  - 'Ten children had accidents in the Country Park last week.'
- Write a letter from Susan and Julie to David North. Tell him the story about Mr Beech and his dogs. Also, tell him about what the doctor at the hospital said.
- Work with another student. Discuss this question: David North says, 'I think I know how to get him.' What do you think David North means? How can he 'get' Mr Beech?

#### Chapters 11-13

- Write the name of the person or people in these sentences.
  - ..... met Mr Beech some years ago.
  - ..... bribed people in a village in the north. Because of him, there were accidents and children were ill because of the smoke.
  - ..... is a television detective.
  - ..... and ..... say they will talk to the television detective.
  - ..... films Mr Beech and the dogs at the mine.

- ..... and ..... talk for the television about the day Mr Beech tried to bribe them.
- Work in small groups. Look up *imagination* in your dictionaries. The story tells us a lot about John Morton's film. Read the chapters carefully and then write a plan for his film. But don't just use the book - use your imagination too!
  - Work in groups of three. You are John Morton, Susan and Julie. Make John Morton's TV interview with Susan and Julie. Have their conversation.

#### Chapters 14-16

- Choose the right answer.
  - Mr Beech closes the supermarket to Susan's family because
    - it is late.
    - he knows about the film.
  - The car isn't working so Susan's parents can't go
    - to the fish shop.
    - to the supermarket in the next village.
  - That night Susan goes to bed hungry because
    - her parents are angry with her.
    - there is no food.
  - Susan's dad says that the vegetables in his garden are black
    - because of the weather.
    - because of the smoke from the mine.
  - On Thursday evening the village is very quiet because
    - everybody is watching 'Stealing the Hills'.
    - everybody is at a meeting.
  - On Friday morning the village people have a meeting about
    - Mr Beech.
    - Susan and Julie.
- Answer these questions.
  - How does Susan's father change?
  - What good things happen at the end of the story for Susan's family and the village? Write them down.
- Write a different ending to the story - but make it a happy one!

### Activities after reading the book

Talk with another student.

Do you think Susan is different from most boys and girls? How is she different?

