The Great GOLDEN NUGGET of Utah



Stella Santa Cruz

Scott Fraser

Nelson Literacy Directions

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The Great Golden Nugget of Utah

Written by Stella Santa Cruz
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Meet the Characters

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Jake

An army deserter.



Washington

A runaway slave.



Ulysses

Jake's horse (pronounced *"you-le-sees"*).



Taovuts

A native American chief.



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POSTCARD

Dear Reader

My grandfather loved "westerns" and kept a drawer full of paperback "western" novels in his study. I used to read them, and I remember the action, settings and characters in those books aways seemed colourful and larger than life. Years later, I wanted to write my own "western" – and here it is!

Stella Santa Cruz
Author

The United States



1. Utah
2. Colorado
3. Kansas
4. Missouri

1 A True Story?

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With a satisfied press of the "enter" button, the old man finished his work at the computer and relaxed in his comfortable leather chair.

A surreptitious glance at his wristwatch confirmed that it was late and he'd been working at home for more hours than he'd expected. "I spend far too much time in this office," he declared. But, ever since he'd been elected, he'd accepted that being a United States Congressman meant he could never expect to keep regular hours. The incessant demands of having an important role in government made sure of that.

The heavy oak door to the congressman's home office creaked open and a pair of hopeful eyes peered up at him.

"Grandad, it's almost bedtime," said his grandson. "Can you tell me a story?"

"Sure," smiled the old man. He swung the young boy up on his knee. "What kind of story would you like to hear?"

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"Just make one up," replied the boy. "Mum says you're good at making up stories. It's your job."

The old man chuckled. "I guess it is an occupational hazard," he replied. "Well, I ..." The man glanced around his office for inspiration. And then his eyes fell upon a small plaque that proudly framed his family's coat of arms.

The congressman pursed his lips thoughtfully and glanced down at his grandson. It was probably time to tell him the story that he'd been saving for the right moment – the story that had been passed down to him from his grandfather.

"How about a story called *The Great Golden Nugget of Utah*?" suggested the old man.

The boy's eyes widened. "Wow," he said. "That sounds exciting. Is it a true story?"

"Well," said his grandfather, clearing his throat. "Why don't I just tell the story, and let's see if you can guess."



2 A Man and His Horse

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When Jake threw the bone-dry twigs he'd collected onto the fire, flames transformed them into embers the colour of fantastic scarlet rubies and tangerine topaz.

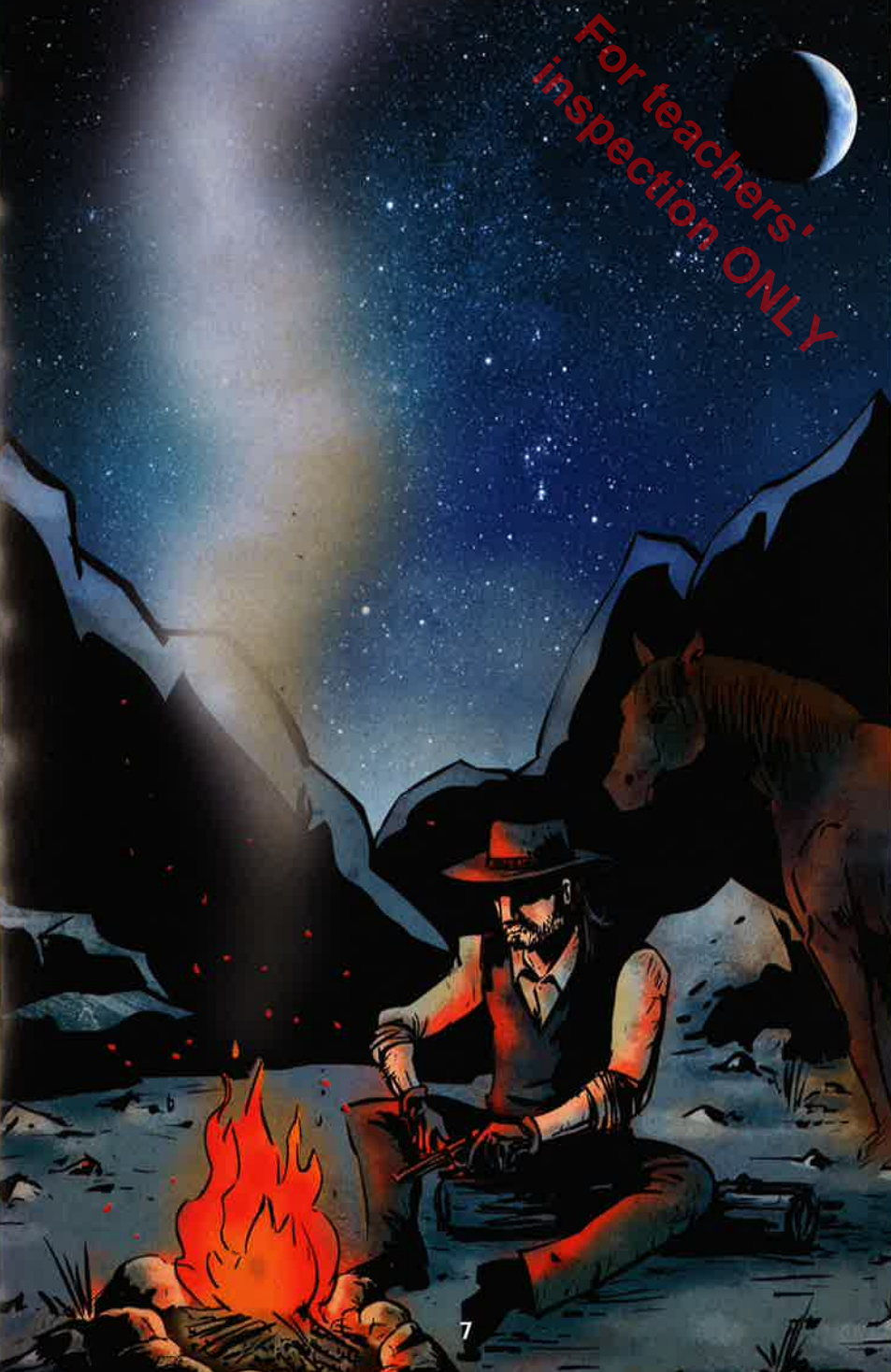
Flickering shadows distorted the outline of his horse, Ulysses, into a shimmering steed that trembled across the sandstone behind his flank. A spire of smoke curled lazily into the calm night air.

Above the lone man and horse, a band of glittering stars stretched from horizon to horizon, as if someone had used a giant celestial paintbrush to splash a swathe of diamonds across the heavens.

The enormous night seemed to swallow every sound, except for the occasional click of iron shoe upon stone, as Ulysses shifted his weight from one hoof to another – and the occasional click of steel upon steel, as Jake checked his Smith and Wesson revolver.

Since Jake had deserted from the rebel Confederate army fighting a bitter civil war against Union soldiers from the north, his trustworthy revolver had become





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one of only two friends he could depend upon. The other was Ulysses, who asked only for a handful of oats in return for carrying Jake further and further away from the troubled southern battlefields.

Together, they had ridden out of the new state of Missouri, westwards across the lawless territory of Kansas. Slowly, as the weeks transformed themselves into months, they moved through a wilderness area whose Spanish name reflected its rocks and soils – colorado or "red-coloured". Finally, the horse and its rider had made it into Utah, the wild territory named after the Native American tribe who lived there. Settlers who ventured this far found the uncompromising territory and its inhabitants tough – as the deserted, half-burned farmhouse he'd passed earlier in the day had testified.

"Ulysses, my friend," said Jake, as he lay down on the unforgiving sandstone and gazed up at the stars. "There's a mighty fine show twinkling up there for us tonight."

Ulysses whinnied gently, the firelight glinting in his tired brown eyes.

"There's just you and me, the rocks and the sky, and no one else for a hundred miles," said Jake contentedly. "I'm guessing this'll be the closest we ever get to being free."



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Jake knew the unfortunate fate that awaited deserters who were captured. This far west, most people were a law unto themselves, and it was difficult to tell whether they were pro-Union or pro-Confederate. Jake took the sensible approach, which was that regardless of which side they supported, everybody was pro-reward. The twenty silver dollars placed on the capture of a deserter was enough to sway anyone's opinions.

Consequently, he and Ulysses avoided the few towns and outposts along their slow, dusty route westwards, preferring the splendid, peaceful isolation of the prairies and the desert. There, no one would ask awkward questions. No one would wonder aloud about the lone rider and his horse. No one would pay a second thought to what direction they were heading, or what circumstances they were leaving behind.

A glowing ember exploded with a fierce "crack" and, for a second, all of Jake's senses were instantly alert. His right hand shot instinctively towards the bone handle of the Smith and Wesson revolver on his belt. A shower of orange sparks rose from the campfire, and Jake flicked his eyes across at Ulysses. A wary horse was the best alarm that Jake could wish for – but Ulysses's ears and