

*A Curriculum Guide to*  
**The Haunting of Josh Weston**  
Written by Melinda Rucker Haynes

### **About the Author**

Melinda Rucker Haynes grew up in the city of Kingman in northwestern Arizona. While earning a degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, she returned to Arizona for a few months to help her parents out with their new ranch off Old Route 66. There, Melinda found herself surrounded by acres of rock, cacti, stray burros, coyotes, and plenty of rattlesnakes. Deciding that ranch life wasn't for her, she returned to Las Vegas to teach, write grants, conduct educational research, and become an award-winning author. The story of Josh Weston and his paranormal counseling was inspired by her time on the ranch and by a case study she worked on during her time as a reading clinician. In order to find out more about Melinda and her other books, please visit her website at <http://www.melindaruckerhaynes.com>.

### **Kudos for *The Haunting of Josh Weston***

"Melinda Rucker Haynes blasts onto the scene with a heart-stopping page turner too engrossing to put down. If you miss this one, you've missed something special." – Maggie Shayne, New York Times Best Selling Author

"... a twice-nominated RWA Golden Heart Award Finalist for Best Young Adult ... full of danger, excitement, ghosts, and some trials of a young boy turning into a young man, the hard way." – Détra Fitch, *HUNTRESS BOOK REVIEWS*

"This first of a series is a well-written, fast paced story. Lively characters, and action with lots of twists and turns, make this a really good read." – N. L. Banks, *SharpWriter Reviews*

### **Story Summary**

Fifteen-year-old Josh Weston and his mother move to his grandfather's ranch in the northwestern Arizona desert after the death of his father. Josh blames himself for his father being killed and for the shooting death of his cousin and best friend, Ethan. At his new school, Yucca High, Josh is relentlessly tormented by a dangerous bully. Unable to see any way out of his problems, Josh considers ending his life one moonlit night on a mesa overlooking a canyon. But luckily for him, the ghost of a cantankerous old prospector and his ornery white burro appear and help Josh navigate through a series of bizarre, and often dangerous, events. If he is to survive, he must learn to have confidence in himself and let go of the past.

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## Pre-Reading Activities

The Haunting of Josh Weston takes place on and around a ranch near Oatman, Arizona. Use the following online resources to have students conduct research about the setting for the story:

[http://www.desertusa.com/oatman/du\\_oatman.html](http://www.desertusa.com/oatman/du_oatman.html)

<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/az-oatman.html>

<http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/az/oatman.html>

<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gtusa/usa/az/oatman.htm>

Go online or to your public library to use authoritative online databases to find trusted information on history.

Wild West Magazine in General Onefile in our statewide databases

U.S. History in Context for related historical information

Ask students to break into groups and read the online material about Oatman, AZ and the surrounding area. Task each group with finding specific information about the location and topography, the origin (namesake), brief history of the town, mining history, and the significance of burros.

After the research by each group is complete, ask a spokesperson from each group to report out on information about their assigned topic. Encourage students to take notes about each topic using a note grid.

**Reading Log:** As the students read the book, encourage them to keep a log of how the setting affects the plot, conflict between characters, and the mood of the story.

## Figurative Language Lesson

The author's use of figurative language helps make the story more interesting. Conduct a mini lesson, prior to reading the book, to familiarize students with similes and metaphors. Below are links for video lessons and worksheets on this concept:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoSBVNUO2LU>

<http://www.growingwithgrammar.com/files/www5smplelessfinal.pdf>

[http://www.beaconlearningcenter.com/documents/2338\\_01.pdf](http://www.beaconlearningcenter.com/documents/2338_01.pdf)

As students read the book, ask them to keep a log, highlight, or place sticky notes on pages that include a simile or a metaphor. Discuss the meaning of each and how it helps to make the story more interesting.

# Chapter 1

## Vocabulary

spectacle	nark	malicious	deftly	prospector	oasis
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### Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Josh get kicked off the school bus on his very first ride home? Who comes to his aid afterward?
2. What simile does the author use to describe another “fresh start” spoiled by Josh?
3. Both Josh and Larry fight on the bus but only Josh receives a consequence. What information does Carrie share with Josh about why Larry “owns the bus” and will never get into trouble?
4. As Carrie and Josh walk home she says, “I didn’t know him, but I’m real sorry about your Dad – is that why you guys came here?” What do you think happened to Josh’s father?
5. Use information provided toward the end of the chapter to explain where Escondido Ranch is located.

### Text to Self Connection

It seems as if trouble follows Josh wherever he goes. At the beginning of the story he immediately encounters the school bully and has to deal with the consequences of that interaction. Has there ever been a time when you were bullied? If so, describe the bullying and the outcome of the interaction.

### Make a Prediction

Throughout the first chapter, Josh hears whisperings and then heading home to the ranch, Carrie tells him “That place isn’t like anywhere else. There are—*things*—at the ranch. Weirdness and . . . maybe dangerous.” What do you think this “weirdness” could be?

## Chapter Guides to Enhance Comprehension

Each chapter will include the following activities to enhance student's understanding of the text. Use for whole class discussion, group work, or as individual comprehension activities.

**Vocabulary** – students will define challenging or unfamiliar words before reading each chapter.

**Comprehension Questions** – students will answer questions at a variety of levels in discussion or written response form.

Text to self-connections, make a prediction, and writing prompts will appear at the end of every few chapters in order for students to respond in depth about key events happening in the story.

**Text to Self Connection** – students will make a text to self connection in order to strengthen their comprehension of the story.

**Make a Prediction** – students will analyze what they already know about the storyline and characters to make predictions about future story events.

**Writing Prompts** – students will construct a written response to one of the given prompts.

## Chapter 2

### Vocabulary

chortled	revelation	impish	relentless	withering	burnished
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### Comprehension Questions

1. What simile does the author use in the first paragraph to describe the dogs sniffing out the burro trail?
2. Why isn't Josh going to tell his mom about the incident on the bus?
3. What reason does Josh give in response to Carrie's question about why they moved to Granddad Lee's ranch?
4. Before running off, what important information about his mom does Carrie share with Josh?
5. As Josh naps in a chair, he dreams a grisly dream about his cousin Ethan. Do you think this event really took place as it appears in his dream or was it just that, a dream? Explain your answer.
6. Josh and his mom go for a picnic on a mesa overlooking the valley. As it gets dark, his mom told him to listen to the "Great Spirit." Who do you think his mother is referring to and can Josh hear it?

# Chapter 3

## Vocabulary

inevitable	sneer	prodding	humiliations	comply
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### Comprehension Questions

1. At school, Josh seems to be minding his own business in the hallway, yet Larry goes after him. Why do you think Larry does this?
2. Who breaks up the fight between Josh and Larry? What are the consequences for the boys?
3. While in his mother's office, what information does Josh learn about Larry?
4. Josh is once again a "victim" in the fight with Larry, but must serve an hour detention. Do you feel this is a fair consequence? Why or why not?

### Text to Self Connection

In this chapter, Josh is once again bullied and must suffer a consequence that seems unfair. Describe a time that you felt you were made to suffer a consequence that was unfair.

# Chapter 4

## Vocabulary

brawl	rattletrap	sweltering	traitorous	procession
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### Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Mike Benton, Carrie's dad, at Josh's house when he and his mother arrive home?
2. Describe the scene that Josh witnesses through the window between Mike and his mom. How does this make Josh feel?
3. Once again, Josh has a horrific nightmare as he sleeps. This time it is about his mom, Carrie, and his cousin Ethan. How do these nightmares make him feel?
4. Josh blames himself for many things, including his father's death. Why does Josh feel responsible for his dad dying?
5. At the end of the chapter, Josh feels so tortured by the events of his past that he wants to "stop time for himself." What do you think this means and where do you think he is headed?

### Writing Prompt for Chapters 1 - 4

Josh is definitely struggling with some demons from the past and moving to a new town does not seem to be helping him put these demons to rest. Think about his issues, the hearing voices, the death of his cousin, the death of his dad, and being bullied. What do you do when going through a hard time? Explain how you think he could begin to heal from this issues and how becoming friends with Carrie might help.

# Chapter 5

## Vocabulary

sauntered	hypnotized	grimace	illuminated	vacant	furtive
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### Comprehension Questions

1. As Josh sits on the rock at the mesa, he sees and hears an old man. Who is this and what warning does he give Josh?
2. Why is Powder Pete out with Snowball so late?
3. After Powder Pete says, "I'll be watching you boy, so don't do anything stupid," the light from the lantern blazes brighter and Pete and Snowball vanish. Do you think that Powder Pete and Snowball are real or a figment of Josh's imagination? Give reasons to justify your answer.
4. At the end of the chapter, the author describes Josh's forgotten watch and how it begins to keep time again. What do you think this means and how is it an important symbol for the events that happened in the chapter?



# Chapter 6

## Vocabulary

dissipated	rationalized	accumulation	arrowheads	lulled
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### Comprehension Questions

1. Josh wakes up and doesn't feel like his usual self, he actually feels good. Do you think his run in with Powder Pete could have anything to do with his new good feelings? Explain.
2. When Josh's mom hands him his watch that he forgot on the table, it is running an hour and a half behind. This is probably the amount of time that he spent on the mesa the night before. Could time have stopped for Josh to have this experience? Why or why not?
3. At breakfast, Carrie questions Josh's mom about his detention. What is her reason for having Josh serve a detention with Larry?
4. After the conversation at breakfast, Josh is feeling better about his detention on Monday. Why is this?
5. Carrie extends a dinner invitation from her mom to Josh and his mother. Josh's mom readily accepts it. Why does Josh feel uneasy about this?
6. As Josh and his mom clean the house, they don't uncover any of her things from childhood. Why not? Explain.
7. Josh has a panic attack as he begins to clean out his grandfather's closet. What does he find there that triggers this attack and how does he overcome it?

### Make a Prediction

In this chapter, Josh finds letters written by his mother that were never opened by his grandfather. Instead of showing them to his mom, he hides them in a box. Will he read them? If so, what information do you think they will contain?

# Chapter 7

## Vocabulary

petrified

paragon

ornery

dilapidated

proprietor

### Comprehension Questions

1. After dinner, Carrie and Josh follow their parents to the barn. There, Josh hears giggling coming from one of the stalls. Describe what he and Carrie find in the stall.
2. After seeing the burros on the road, Josh thinks about asking his mom if she knows Powder Pete and Snowball. Why does he stop short of asking her?
3. As Josh and his mom discuss the lost mines and his grandfather, the name Snowball comes up in the conversation. What does Josh's mom have to say about this and how is this significant for Josh?
4. Josh and his mom go to dinner at The Nielsen Hotel in downtown Oatman. Who is the proprietor of the hotel and how is Josh greeted by him when he approaches them at dinner?
5. Why do Josh and his mom leave the hotel before their dinner comes?
6. On Monday, Josh was able to serve his detention without incident, but what happens after that shows us that Larry is not backing down. Explain what takes place and tell what you think might happen as the clash between Josh and Larry continues.

# Chapter 8

## Vocabulary

fragile

disciple

cavern

dematerialized

alcove

### Comprehension Questions

1. As Josh's mother and Mike hang an old mirror in the bedroom, they discover an old claim map hidden behind the paper backing. What else do they find and where do you think it came from?
2. Josh leaves his mother's room to go examine the claim map more carefully in his room. What does he find? Why is this significant?
3. What will Josh have to learn if he is to become a prospector?
4. Carrie intercedes between Josh and Larry before another fight can erupt. Why do you think she does this?
5. As Josh is out hiking on his property, he spots Larry riding his dirt bike. What happens after Josh follows Larry into the mine?

### Text to Self Connection

Carrie seems bound and determined to keep Larry and Josh from fighting. Think of a time that you were able to help two people avoid a disagreement. Explain how you did this and how it made you feel.

### Make a Prediction

Josh is saved from Larry's wrath only to find himself trapped by Powder Pete and Snowball. What do you think will happen to Josh in the mine?

# Chapter 9

## Vocabulary

riled

etiquette

hallucination

phosphorescence

ambled

## Comprehension Questions

1. As Josh talks to Powder Pete in the mine, he learns the story of the prospector's demise. What happened to Powder Pete and Snowball and why are they still hanging around the mine?
2. Powder Pete tries to share a life lesson with Josh. What lesson does he share and how does Josh feel about it? How do you feel about it?
3. Josh learns that Powder Pete and Snowball are really ghosts. Why can he see them, but others cannot?
4. Powder Pete shows Josh why Larry was at the mine. What does Pete show him and what are they going to do about it?

## Make a Prediction

At the end of the chapter, Josh is left alone in the mine with a huge decision to make. Should he take the drugs to the sheriff or throw them down the hole with the others? What do you think he will do and why?

## Writing Prompt for Chapters 5 - 9

Powder Pete has had a lot of time to think about life. He tells Josh that "No one pays attention much to the things going on around them." and that "Everyone is thinking about tomorrow." Think about the things in your life today that are very important. Make a list of the things that you are thankful for right now.

# Chapter 10

## Vocabulary

vigilantly	dawdling	repentant	encumbrances	undulating
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### Comprehension Questions

1. What is Josh and Powder Pete's plan for the cache of drugs? Do you think it is a good idea? Why or why not?
2. How do Josh and Powder Pete manage to leave the drugs at the sheriff sub-station undetected?
3. The town seems to be in an uproar over the drugs that were found at the sheriff's office and Josh is bracing for payback from Larry. How do you think Larry will retaliate?
4. During a conversation about ghosts and keeping secrets, Powder Pete tells Josh that Carrie would believe Josh if he shared the experiences he was having with her. Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. As Josh and Powder Pete sift in the canyon, Josh shares the story about the accident with his cousin Ethan. What really happened and what advice does Powder Pete give Josh?

### Make a Prediction

Powder Pete advises Josh to forgive himself for the accident and move forward with his life. Do you think he will be able to do this? Why or why not?

# Chapter 11

## Vocabulary

remoteness	vicious	optimist	berated	cynical	ritual
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### Comprehension Questions

1. Josh finds out that Escondido Ranch has been passed down through the women in his mother's family and that she plans to leave it to him. How do you think he feels about this?
2. After finding the \$10,000 his grandfather hid, his mother must now carefully go through all of his grandfather's possessions to determine if she can find anymore hidden treasures. Why does Josh is feel uneasy about this?
3. Josh finally gets the courage to ask his mother about her engagement to Mike Benton. What is her response?
4. When sifting through his grandfather's things in the barn, what does Josh find in the lining of an old coat?
5. What is engraved on the watch that Josh finds? What significance does it have?
6. Josh's mother acts strange when he shows her the watch, yet she explains that a prospector may have lost it and his grandfather found it. Do you think she is telling the truth? If not, what do you think she is not telling Josh?
7. In the process of going through the boxes in the barn, Josh's mom finds the box of unopened letters that she had sent to her father over the years. How does his mom feel about this find? How does Josh feel?
8. Carrie shares something very important with Josh in the barn. What does she tell him and how does Josh react to this new information?

### Text to Self Connection

Josh thinks that maybe his grandfather is hanging around to see and talk with his mom again. Is there anyone in your life that you wish you could speak to again? If so, who is it and what would you tell that person?

# Chapter 12

## Vocabulary

ashen   morphed   indignation   vulgar   taut   carcass   gondola

### Comprehension Questions

1. Josh is now convinced that Carrie really did see the ghost of his grandfather. Why?
2. Larry finally gets his revenge on Josh for turning his drugs in to the police. What does Larry do and how does Josh react?
3. Josh goes out to the old camping site to think, but when he returns, he gets a call from Larry saying that Carrie has been kidnapped. What does Larry want from Josh in exchange for Carrie?
4. Josh cannot go to the authorities, so who does he “call” for help?
5. What plan does Powder Pete come up with for saving Carrie? Does Josh follow the plan?
6. At Coyote Canyon, Larry and his thugs attack Josh and demand to know where the rest of the drugs are. Who comes to his rescue and what outcome unfolds?

### Make a Prediction

Larry shoots at Powder Pete and Snowball only to see the bullet go right through them and ricochet off the rock wall. What do you think will happen to Josh now? Will he survive?

# Chapter 13

## Vocabulary

exasperated	ambush	condemning	proposition
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### Comprehension Questions

1. Carrie is rescued from the Snowball's Chance in Hell Mine by Sheriff Bates. How does he know where to find her?
2. What type of relationship does Sheriff Bates have with Powder Pete?
3. After returning Josh to Escondido Ranch, Powder Pete says that he has to be "moving on." How does this make Josh feel? Explain.
4. Why did Josh's mom think living at the ranch would help Josh get away from the pressures of his past? Did it work?
5. Powder Pete helped Josh tremendously throughout the story. What did you learn at the end of the book about Powder Pete and the friendship he had with Josh's mom in the past?
6. The ghost of Granddad Lee appears and is having a discussion with Josh's mom on the porch. What do you think they will talk about?
7. Describe what type of adventure you think Powder Pete may have in store for Josh and Carrie.
8. At the very end of the book, the ghost of Josh's Dad appears. What do you think he will say to Josh?

### Writing Prompt for Chapters 10 - 13

Josh's feelings about Escondido Ranch and his move change dramatically from the beginning to the end of the story. In a written statement, compare and contrast his feelings throughout the story using examples from the book.



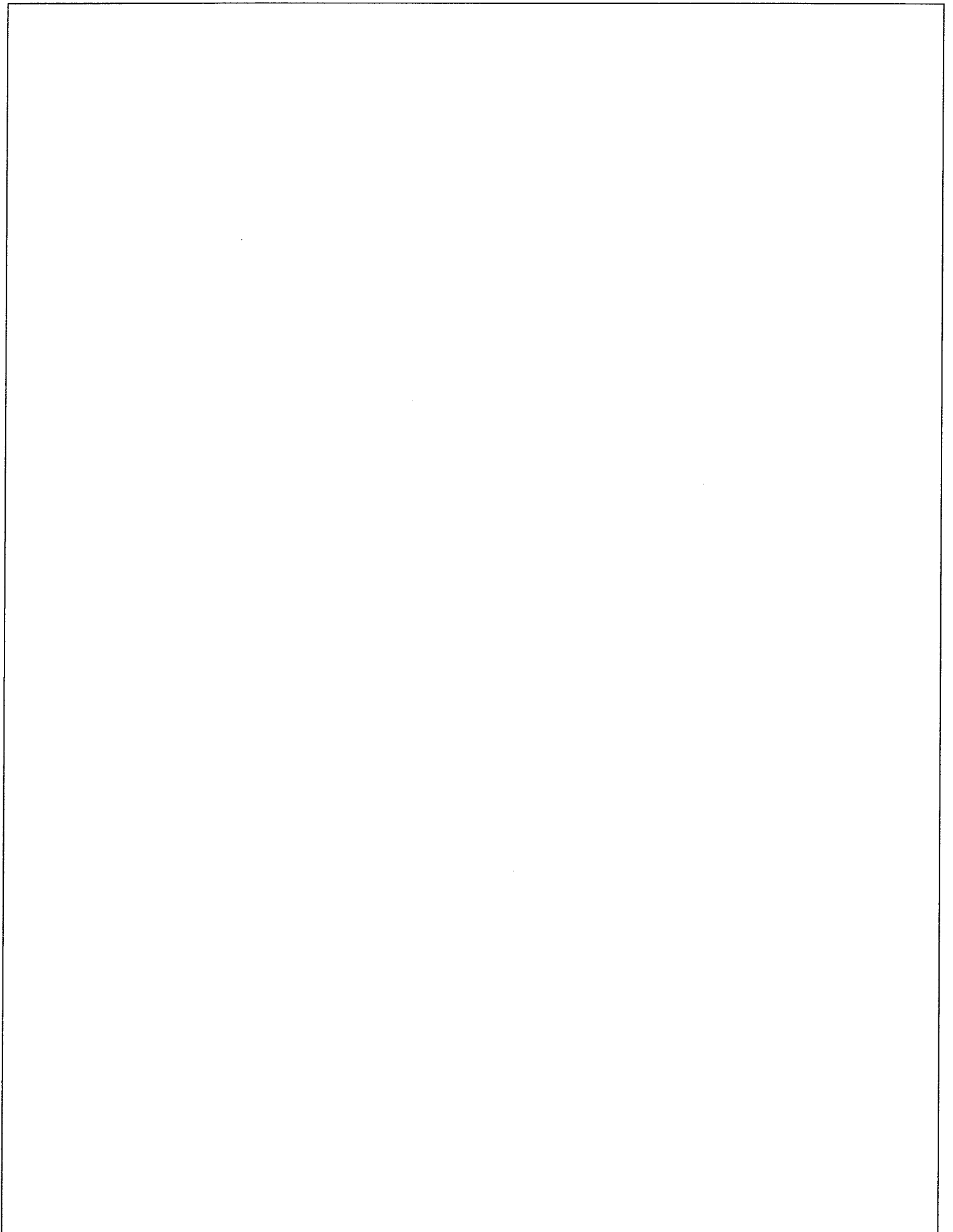
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## Note Grid for Research

Use the note grid below to record information about the setting of the story.

### Oatman, Arizona

<b>Location and Topography</b>	<b>Origin (Namesake)</b>
<b>Brief History of Oatman</b>	<b>Mining History</b>
<b>Significance of Burros</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reading Log

As you read the book, *The Haunting of Josh Weston*, keep a log of how the setting affects the plot, conflict and/or mood in the story.

<b>Page #</b>	<b>Brief Description of Story Event</b>	<b>Significance of the Setting</b> (Plot, Conflict, Mood)
<b>Page #</b>	<b>Brief Description of Story Event</b>	<b>Significance of the Setting</b> (Plot, Conflict, Mood)
<b>Page #</b>	<b>Brief Description of Story Event</b>	<b>Significance of the Setting</b> (Plot, Conflict, Mood)
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<b>Page #</b>	<b>Brief Description of Story Event</b>	<b>Significance of the Setting</b> (Plot, Conflict, Mood)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Figurative Language Log

**Simile** – a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by *like* or *as*

**Metaphor** – a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them

Example:

Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning
3	Hot, sage-scented dust boiled in through the doors as they slapped open.	Use of the metaphor to convey how hot the dust felt when it came in through the open bus door

Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning
Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning
Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning
Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning
Page #	Simile or Metaphor	Meaning

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Simile/Metaphor Illustration

In the space below, choose a simile or metaphor from the book to illustrate.

**Example:** She's as cuddly as a cactus.



**Simile or Metaphor:**

## Character Comparison

When comparing and contrasting characters, consider all types of character traits - think about the physical appearance, personality traits, character, significant events in their life, and actions of each character in the book. Use the Venn Diagram below to organize your thinking about the two characters, Josh and Larry. For this character comparison, label each circle with the name of one character. In the outside areas of the circles, write the traits that apply only to that character (contrasting). In the area where the circles intersect, write the characteristics that apply to both characters (comparing).

