

Introduction

Eric Wilson novels excite the imagination of young readers in grades 4-6. Appealing to children's inherent keen interest in mystery, Eric Wilson has skilfully woven accurate Canadian geographic and historic information into his writing. He also touches on current Canadian social and political issues in many of his novels. As such, these novels lend themselves to the integrated study of the mystery genre with Canadian geography topics in social studies and investigation units in science.

The Prairie Dog Conspiracy provides rich material for the study of setting, characterization and plot development. It can be used independently or as an introduction to the other novels in the series, thereby providing a national setting within which the regional stories come together to make a whole. The varying levels of difficulty in the novels provide opportunity to accommodate individual student ability, experience and interests.

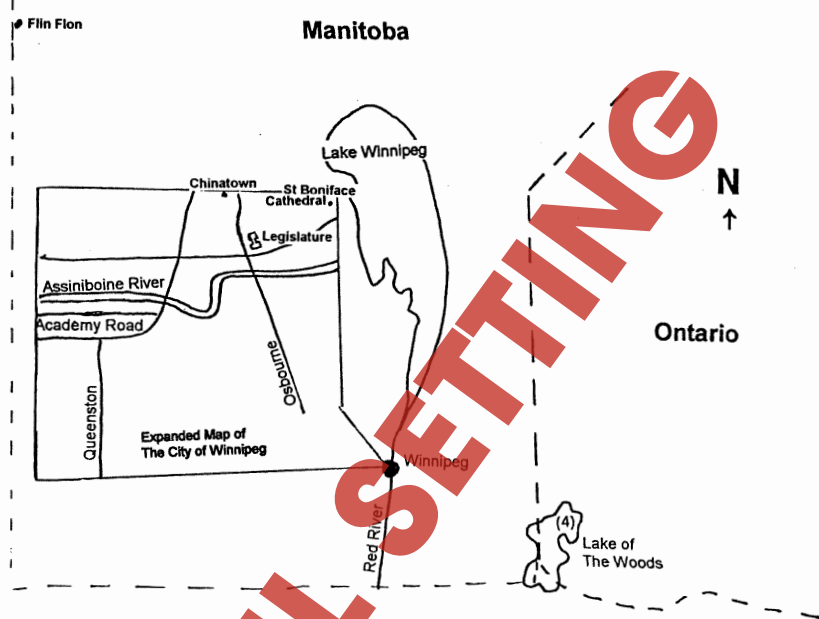
Students can supplement the package with meaningful research which will strengthen the impact of their work. They will take great delight in finding information on the Internet that directly links to the places or events in the novels. Every province, territory, and most cities have up-to-date information available on an Internet website.

For added interest, students could do further research on the tracking and orienteering skills which are briefly introduced in the novel. These skills are a way of life for many Canadians living in the north.

Through the internet, students can be introduced to the author, Eric Wilson. His website address is www.ericwilson.com.

The Prairie Dog Conspiracy
Eric Wilson

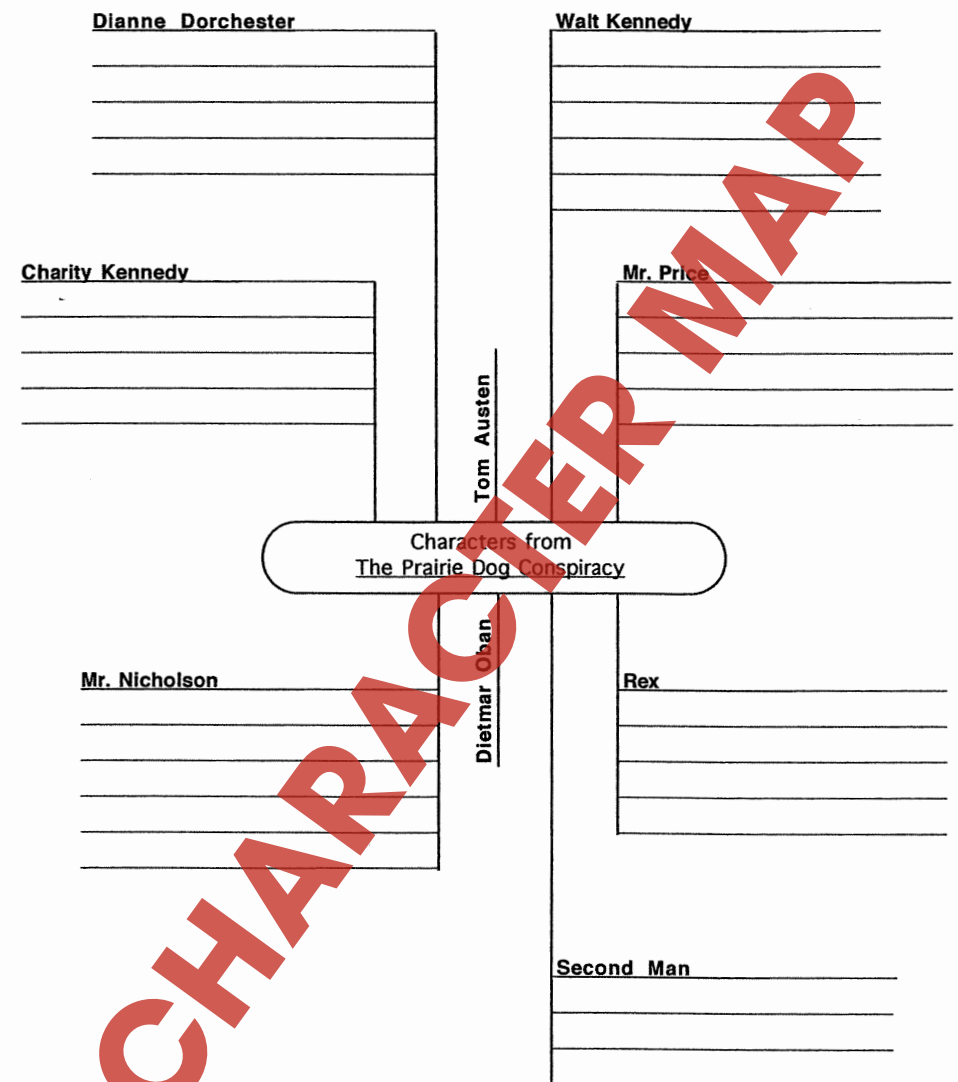
Setting



Referring to the above map, fill in the blanks as you read the story.

1. After watching the ceremony at the _____, Tom spotted Rex talking on a cell phone.
2. While at the library, Tom read of a similar kidnapping that had taken place, three years earlier, in _____.
3. The ransom money changed hands at _____.
4. While Tom was eating in _____, he spotted a cell phone similar to one that Rex had used.

As you read the story, add information about the characters identified in the character web.



Character Summary of Tom Austen

APPEARANCE

ACTIONS, FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND WORDS

CHARACTER TRAITS

Chapter Questions



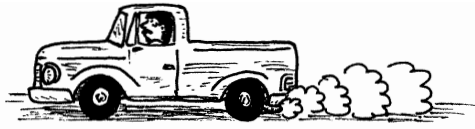
Chapter 1

1. How was Tom able to convince Dietmar to accompany him to the old abandoned house for the investigation?

2. Why did Tom not call the police after he saw the light in the attic of the abandoned house?

3. What evidence indicated to Tom that someone had been into the house recently?

Chapter 3



1. Who were the people involved in "Operation Golden Child"?

2. What was Tom's theory about "Operation Golden Child"?

3. a) Why did Tom believe Dianne was in danger?

- b) What happened to Dianne?

4. Why did Tom believe that Dianne must have known the person in the brown van?

3. Mr. Price assigned Tom a research project using the vertical files at the Public Library.

a) What did Tom learn from the *Kidnapping* folder?

b) What did Tom learn from the *Impaired Driving* folder?

Final Projects

1. Characterization

Use the items you have recorded on your character summary to write a one paragraph character sketch of Tom Austen. Your paragraph should include the following:

- a) a brief description of the character's appearance
- b) five (5) character traits, supported with information from the story
- c) a topic and concluding sentence.

2. Letter

Imagine you are Tom Austen. Write a letter to your sister, Liz, telling her about your adventure on this case. Remember to keep the events in chronological order. Use the friendly letter format.

3. Map Activity

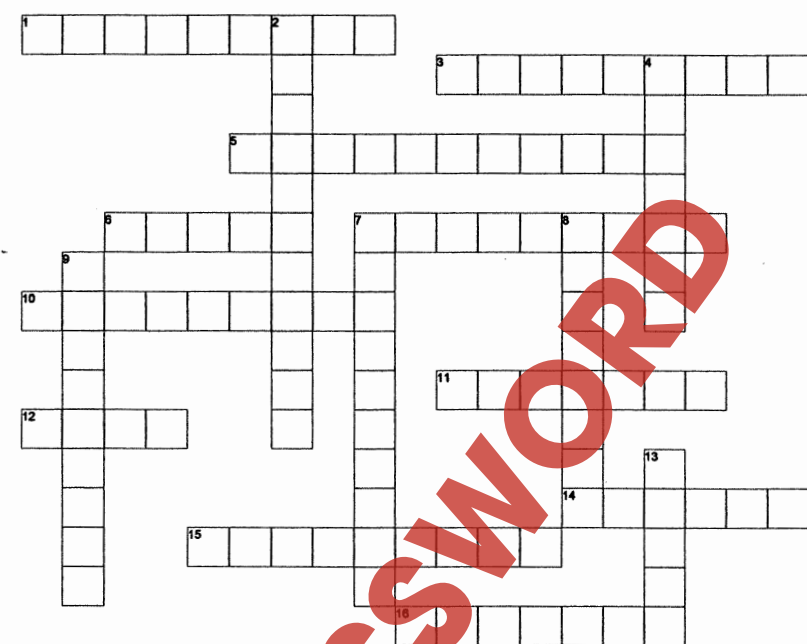
On your classroom map of Canada, mark and label the main setting of this novel.

4. Illustration

On the front cover, illustrate your favourite scene from the story.

5. Vocabulary

Complete the following crossword.



ACROSS

1. Stole a person by force (p.24)
3. Cold caused by low temperature and wind (p.105)
5. Motorized sleds (p.106)
6. Major robbery (p.20)
7. A huge church (p.38)
10. Dried meat (2 words)(p.104)
11. Private eye (p.16)
12. Famous Melis leader (p.39)
14. Money paid to kidnapers (p.85)
15. Part of the city with many Chinese businesses (p.74)
16. Railway bridge (p.42)

DOWN

2. Place that shows a representation of the stars and the sky (p.70)
4. Person held for ransom (p.8)
7. Code used by spies to disguise a message (p.12)
8. Means "terrible lizard" (p.71)
9. End or kill (p.108)
13. Trap (p.111)

NOTE: Page numbers are from the 1996 edition of this novel.



Chapter 5

1. a) Tom believed he knew the identity of the kidnapper. Whom did Tom suspect?

b) With whom did Tom share his theory and why?

2. Why was Tom able to attend the ceremony at the Legislative building?

3. Tom came up with a second theory about "Operation Golden Child". Explain his new theory.

b) What did Tom learn from the *Impaired Driving* folder?

Tom learned that Walt Kennedy had a criminal record due to a second offence of impaired driving.

Chapter 5

a) Tom believed he knew the identity of the kidnapper. Whom did Tom suspect?

Tom suspected Mr. Walt Kennedy was the kidnapper.

b) With whom did Tom share his theory and why?

Tom shared his theory with his teacher, Mr. Price. Tom wanted an adult opinion on his theory and he valued his teacher's advice. Tom's parents were away on vacation and he felt that his Uncle Henry was not the right person with whom to discuss the issue.

Why was Tom able to attend the ceremony at the Legislative building?

Mr. Scholson, the school Principal, was unable to use his invitation due to a meeting. All of the students convinced Mr. Price to let Tom use the invitation and go with him.

Tom came up with a second theory about "Operation Golden Child". Explain his new theory.

Tom now believed "Operation Golden Child" was a kidnapping and the Golden Child was Dianne.

What happened in the bookstore?

Mr. Dorchester left an attache case by the paperback shelf, exited the store, and caught a taxi. Rex then walked to the paperback shelf, picked up the attache case, and walked toward the door. Tom tried to stop Rex and knocked the attache case out of his hand. Rex escaped in the pick-up truck.

ANSWER KEY