



Cooper and the Enchanted Metal Detector

by Adam Osterweil

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cooper runs an antiques business with his mother in the barn outside their old house near Elmira, New York. But his mother is usually lost in her own thoughts, so Cooper does most of the work by himself, and he also runs the house, sort of, and pays the bills, sometimes. When he is given Decto, a temperamental metal detector, Cooper discovers that his family's property is filled with revolutionary war artifacts, many of them valuable. Suddenly his once quiet life is filled with people—a museum curator, an Iroquois storyteller, men with complicated legal documents for his mother to sign. Everyone in this funny and wise novel seems to know what Cooper should do. Except for Cooper.

Ages 10 – 14 / Grades 5 – 9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Early birds at yard sales – buyers who get in before the sale officially starts – are usually forbidden, yet Cooper almost always gets away with being an early bird. Why is he given special treatment? Does he deserve it? How would you describe his behavior?
2. Although Cooper lives with his mother, he is largely raising himself. Why has his mother withdrawn from the world? Why does she care so much about the past but fear the future? How well does Cooper handle his responsibilities? Why isn't he looking for help?
2. Take a closer look at Cooper's relationship with Mr. Shepherd. How does it develop over time? What do they know about each other when the book begins? What do they understand about each other by the book's end?
3. Cooper routinely converses with stuffed animals, his bike, and his metal detector. Does he really believe these objects have minds of their own? For Cooper, what separates fantasy from reality?

4. George Washington is rightly remembered as a compassionate leader, but during the Revolutionary War he sought to destroy the Iroquois people. Why? How did Cooper's opinion of Washington change when he learned more about the battle of Newtown? Did yours?
5. Mr. Shepherd believes that there are three kinds of time machines: the arts, the sky, and the Earth. Do you agree? Can you think of any other sort of time machine?
6. "You shouldn't kill people," Cooper says (p. 46), quoting his mother. "When you kill one person, you kill a billion." What does she mean? Do you agree?
7. There are many ways to dig into the past. Cooper uses Decto to uncover valuable artifacts from the Revolutionary War on his property. How can you discover more about your community? What tools do you need?
8. "It must have been scary for kids living in Upstate New York in 1799," Cooper decides (p. 130). What special dangers confronted the Iroquois children? What about the children of settlers? What dangers do today's children's face that 18th century children didn't?
9. Cooper sometimes goes step-by-step through his past to understand how he arrived at his current situation. Try to look at this novel in the same step-by-step way. What are the important moments that change the course of Cooper's life?
10. Jan calls Cooper "Little Butterfly" and she believes the boy is in the reincarnation of her late husband, Xavier. In what ways are Cooper and Xavier alike? In what ways are they different?
11. Money is always scarce in Cooper's house but he refuses to sell a valuable coin, instead putting it in the historical museum. Why did he make that choice? Would you?
12. At the end of the novel, Cooper climbs up the hill behind his house. What does he see from up there? What does he find out about his self? How will his life be different once he comes down?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adam Osterweil was born and raised in New York, and he now teaches junior high school English at Springs School in Springs, New York. He is the author of four previous novels: *The Lost Treasure of Talus Scree*, *The Amulet of Komondor*, *The Baseball Card Kid*, and *The Comic Book Kid*.

A note to teachers and school librarians: these discussion questions will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, especially the collaboration and comprehension skills included in the speaking and listening standards. See CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1 (and for grades upward through 9-10).