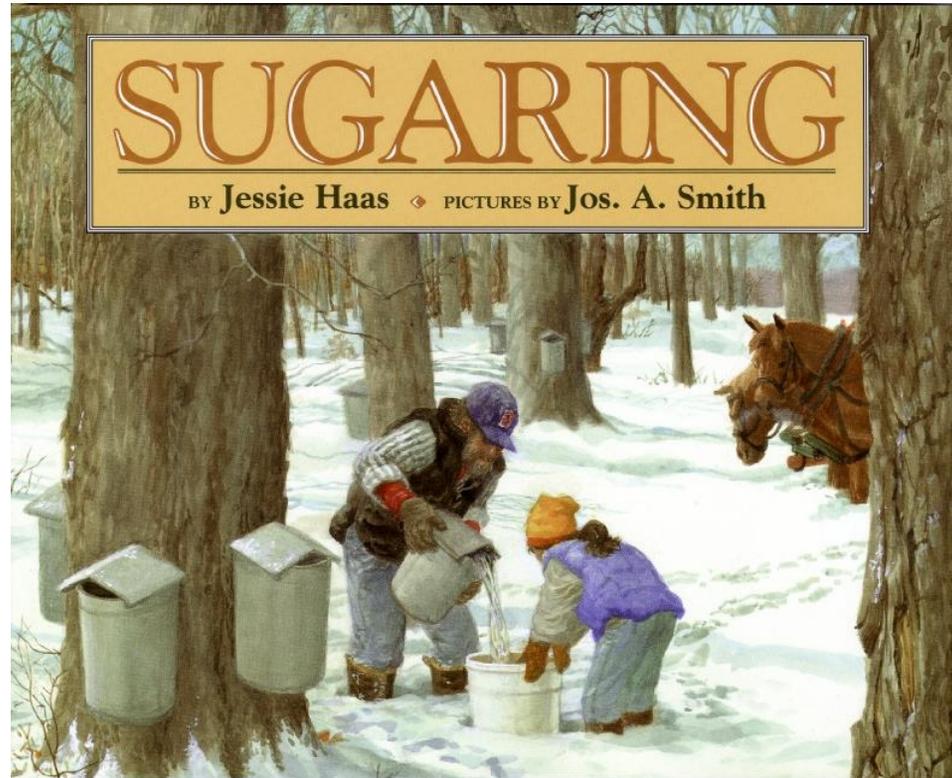


**Literature in Context:  
A Community-Based Education Guide  
to *Sugaring***



by Robin Huntley  
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## Summary

Set in the hills of Vermont, Jessie Haas' Sugaring teaches the traditional process of sugaring through a narrative that brings the intergenerational nature of the work to light. Protagonist Nora helps her grandfather drive a team of horses through the family's sugarbush, stopping to collect sap at each sugar maple. Next, the two keep a fire burning in an evaporator, boiling off excess water until the sap turns to syrup, running in a sheet off of a metal spoon. The evaporator runs late into the night, turning hundreds of gallons of sap into sweet syrup. While Nora and her grandfather tend the fire and flick cream into the sap bubbles to keep it from boiling over, Nora's grandmother turns an earlier batch of syrup into sheets of delicious, flaky maple sugar. Nora makes sure to share chunks of the sweet brown treat with the team of horses before they head back out into the sugarbush, ready to repeat the process over again.

## Critical Thinking Questions

Sugaring serves as both a work of fiction and an instructional text simultaneously. Since the vocabulary and procedures specific to sugaring are woven throughout the story, readers not only engage with the story, they learn essential information about the means through which sap becomes sugar. Utilize the questions below to guide readers in deepening their understanding of the text, as well as translating the information in the story into knowledge of maple syrup production.

### *Questions for Understanding the Text*

- Why doesn't Nora's grandfather want the horses to drink from the bucket?
- Do you think Nora has helped with sugaring before? Explain why or why not.
- Can you tell that Nora's family lives in New England? What clues can you find?
- Nora helps with sugaring, but her attention seems to be elsewhere. What do you think her true interest is?
- Do Nora and her grandfather see the horses in the same way? Explain.
- What kind of maple treat do you think Nora's grandmother can make for the horses?

### *Questions for Understanding Sugaring*

- What kind of weather is necessary for sap to run in maple trees?
- How does an evaporator work? How does it turn sap into syrup?
- How can you tell if maple syrup is ready? What kinds of qualities does it have when it's finished?
- How is maple syrup made into maple sugar?

## Community-Based Learning Map

Sugaring connects readers to a generations-old New England tradition: the art of making maple syrup. A treat enjoyed year-round, maple syrup is a major part of the culture across much of rural New England. Using the resources outlined below, readers can utilize the book as a catalyst for community-based studies of maple syrup production, industry history, cultural traditions, and more.

### *Resources for Self-Directed Learning during Sugaring Season*

#### **Nature Table for March: Maple Buds and Bark**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/03/20/nature-table-20/>

Designed to teach even the most amateur naturalists to correctly identify sugar maple trees, this resource is filled with specific and detailed information that can be easily applied outdoors. Whether or not you think you might have sugar maples around, learning to identify the source of your syrup supports the acquisition of all kinds of identification skills, such as close observation and use of dichotomous keys and other guides.

#### **Maple Syrup: Native American Traditions & New England History**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/htf-536/>

Explore the roots of modern American sugar traditions, which lie in Native American history and culture. Like many other practices now seen as traditional here in New England, sugaring was a skill that foreign settlers learned from Native Americans. Unlike modern Americans, however, Native Americans didn't use maple sap for making syrup! Link studies of maple syrup's Native American roots to studies of local and national history, indigenous cultures, and resiliency skills.

#### **Sugar Shacks & Shared Meals Support Connections & Culture**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/htf-538/>

Western Massachusetts' hills are dotted with sugar shacks that come alive during late winter and early spring! This resource spotlights community celebrations and notable locations, and connects readers with a comprehensive list of all of Massachusetts' sugar shacks. Visit one to see the process of making syrup for yourself, and stay to enjoy a traditional sugar shack meal. Better yet, visit as many sugar shacks as you can to compare the variations in process from shack to shack. Connect with your community by sharing a meal with others – many sugar shacks seat patrons at long, communal tables!

### **Art & Literature of Seasonal Living: The Maple Tree**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/htf-539/>

Artist Robert Strong Woodward and poet Hannah Fries, both western Massachusetts locals (though in different centuries!), are spotlighted in this resource linking sugaring season to art and poetry. Explore digital galleries of Woodward's paintings, particularly a maple-themed gallery in which sugaring seasons of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century can be seen. Similarly, Fries' poetry links trees, sugaring, and the human experience; utilize her tree-themed work to add depth of thought and breadth of content to studies of sugaring.

### **Early Spring Food Tradition: Pancakes & Maple Syrup**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/htf-540/>

What's a study of sugaring without pancakes? Pancakes have been enjoyed by humans for over 6,000 years – they seriously pre-date maple syrup! This resource includes a family recipe alongside one from America's Test Kitchen – compare the two and learn through a culinary lens.

### **Seasons at Our Table: Maple Sugar**

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2012/05/08/seasons/>

Often, the best recipes come from friends and neighbors. Explore this resource to find fourteen recipes for maple-filled, maple-inspired, or maple-accompanying recipes: each one can be served at a community maple breakfast!