

### **Synopsis: *Hendrick, the Dutch native American***

How you can change from a prejudiced white man who hates the native Americans, to a native who no longer trusts white people. That's what happens to Hendrick Pels (age 16), who was taken captive by the Esopus Indians and was adopted by their tribe.

*Hendrick, the Dutch native American* is an award winning historical novel for young adults. It is set in America in the year 1659 and is based on a true story. The book is written in the past tense, from Hendrick's perspective. The story (about 131,000 words) comprises three parts:

*Part I Foxberg*, in which the Dutch settlers' son Hendrick gets captured by the Esopus Indians and is faced with the atrocities at their war camp;

*Part II Strong Bear*, in which Hendrick is adopted by the tribe, grows familiar with their culture and beliefs, and slowly loses his preconceptions;

*Part III Chakwáxush*, in which Hendrick experiences how cruel and unreliable white men can be, permanently distances himself from his former people, and starts fighting for the native Americans.

The three parts of the book represent Hendrick's personal development.

The story broadly follows the history of the first Esopus War. Hendrick and all other male characters have really existed (unfortunately, little is known about the women) and their actions are based on reports and letters surviving from that time. The famous Petrus Stuyvesant plays a modest role in his position as Director General of New Netherland.

### **Summary**

Hendrick, his father, and his brother Evert journey to a settlement on Esopus Creek. Father has some land there and intends to check on his crops, even though a war with the savages seems imminent. Upon their arrival in the village, they find that harvesting has hardly started, since no one is allowed to leave the stockade without an escort of soldiers.

When they hear a volley of musket shots at night, Hendrick thinks the war has started. He and a group of men venture outside to size up the situation. They spot a group of sleeping savages.

Hendrick shoots and kills one of them to make his father proud, thus giving the starting signal for the war - the savages are furious and bent on revenge.

The settlers deliver a pressing letter to Director General Stuyvesant, but he can and will not help them. On the way back, Hendrick and the twelve other men who went out to deliver the letter are taken prisoner by the Esopus Indians and held at their war camp. There is nothing Hendrick can do, besides hope that someone will liberate them, and pray he will not be the next one to be tortured. The weeks that follow are a nightmare.

Unexpectedly one day, the savages untie him and hand him over to an old Indian by the name of Preuwamackan. Preuwamackan takes Hendrick to a native village and entrusts him to the care of Akwaankaateew, a woman who has suffered a great loss. Hendrick thinks he is a slave, but then a charming girl named Pumihleew teaches him their language. Together, the three Indians introduce Hendrick to their language, their culture, their beliefs, and their tribal stories. The natives are different, but not as barbaric as Hendrick thought. They even have some nice customs he soon adopts.

When he falls in love with Pumihleew, this arouses jealousy from Dissquartas, Preuwamackan's son, who seems to have been possessed by evil spirits ever since the death of his best friend. Dissquartas shoots Hendrick, and he barely survives. When Hendrick finds out that *he* is the one who killed Dissquartas's best friend, and that the same young man was Akwaankaateew's son, he wants to ease his conscience and try to undo the evil he has done.

In order to become a true man of the tribe, he needs to find a vision that will tell him his name. As Chakwáxush, Little Tortoise, he is officially adopted by the tribe and free to marry Pumihleew.

The arrival of spring rekindles the hostilities between the Indians and the Dutch. Stuyvesant has declared war, though the wise Preuwamackan strives for peace. While waiting for a meeting with Stuyvesant, their group of Indians find themselves under attack and is forced to flee. Dissquartas and

eleven other Esopus Indians are taken prisoner. Hendrick is appalled at the white men's betrayal, and he and the other youngsters launch a counter-attack. But he soon finds out he does not have the heart for battle: there is only one right path, and that is the path of peace.

Further negotiations take place, until their village gets attacked and Preuwamackan loses his life. The village is destroyed, the natives flee into the woods, and Pumihleew and Hendrick no longer have a place to live. The Dutch have pressed the Esopus Indians so hard that they eventually sign a peace treaty. But Hendrick knows it will not be long before something else goes wrong, because the white men are not to be trusted.

### **Leading character Hendrick**

Hendrick is 16 years old, smallish, and jumpy. All his life he has disappointed his (strict but just) father and looked up to his younger brother, Evert. To make his father proud, he kills a sleeping native American, unwittingly giving the starting signal for the (first Esopus) War. He feels guilty, but never confesses his crime.

The native American war camp is a place of so many atrocities that Hendrick gathers some courage. When the prisoners are told to select two of their own to return home, Hendrick decides to stay, since the Esopus Indians treat him like a child and so he is reasonably safe.

Hendrick is full of rigid prejudice. While learning more about the native American culture, he initially scoffs at their ridiculous customs (marriage is not forever, women are the boss around the house, giving thanks to trees), but gradually he recognizes the beauty and purity of their culture and goes native. He sees the hypocrisy of the white men and will do anything to protect his new family against the danger they represent.

Living with his new people, he discovers he can be who he really is, even though he is not Strong Bear, as he had hoped, but Little Tortoise.

## **Theme**

*Hendrick, the native American* centers on the collision between two cultures.

Hendrick saw the world through the eyes of his father: the native American were evil and barbaric.

Bit by bit, his experiences in the native village force him to abandon his preconceptions, and he has to admit that white people possess just as many wicked and barbaric traits. His hatred slowly burns out and is replaced with respect and love.

*Hendrick, the native American* shows that every story has two sides, and that good and bad depend on which side you're on. I hope that young readers realize what happens if you judge too quickly, and how your opinions may change when you study another culture or religion more closely. Hopefully, such insights will bring a little more respect and tolerance into the world.