**Book:** The Donner Party

**Reviewed By:** Lynn Running

**Level of Difficulty:** Medium

**My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:**

Because of the subject matter, this is difficult book for some students. Those of us who are native Californians have known this story since childhood, but most of my students were completely unaware of the history of Donner Lake and the Donner Party. The book includes some diary entries written in 19th century language that is difficult to understand. Some vocabulary is also old-fashioned and not words used daily which need to be discussed before, or during the reading.

**Students’ Reaction to the book:**

The students enjoyed this book. The California history and geography were very interesting to them. A lot of my students are Chinese, so we did some extra study on the Chinese workers’ role in the building of the railroads, which was very compelling to them. The last part of the book, which details their ultimate hardships, was horrifying to them, but we discussed it openly.

**Tips for tutors who may want to use this book:**

I brought in a large US map and we followed the Donner Party through the states on their journey, which the class really enjoyed.

At our last class we watched the DVD of the PBS documentary about the Donner Party. I still have the DVD if anyone wants to borrow it. We turned on the subtitles while viewing, so the students could read what the commentators were saying. We did some further study about the Gold Rush in San Francisco and the building of the railroad in California.

A lot of my students have been to Lake Tahoe and Reno for vacations, so reading this history of the area was exciting and they enjoyed talking about their trips to the area and how they were able to tell their families about the history.