

## The Traveling Country Doctor

<b>Grade:</b>	4
<b>Locale:</b>	Wimauma and Neighboring South Hillsborough County Florida Communities
<b>When:</b>	Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century
<b>Spark of Interest:</b>	The Traveling Doctor
<b>Content Areas:</b>	Health/Social Studies (Map Skills)
<b>Timeframe:</b>	
<b>Sunshine State Standards:</b>	SS.A.6.2      SS.C.2.2      LA.2.2

*\*It is best to teach this lesson after the lesson titled “Home Remedies”. If taught in tandem, both lessons will provide students with a solid, enjoyable glimpse of health issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneers in Southern Hillsborough County Florida.*

### Abstract:

Dr. (Doc) Harris is a legendary figure in the Wimauma and South Hillsborough area. This doctor who actually made house calls traveled by foot, horseback, buggy, and Model T. Ford. He was the only practicing physician in the area at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students will learn about the impact Doc Harris had on the lives of the people of Wimauma where he lived and the outlying communities in Southern Hillsborough County. They will understand the lifestyle of this “Country Doctor” in the pioneer days of the South Hillsborough County community.

### Materials:

-Roadmap of South County area including Wimauma, Balm, Ruskin, Ft. Lonesome, Picnic, Duette, Riverview, Sun City Center, Sun City, Gibsonton, and Gulf City.

### Key Vocabulary:

-Physician	-Scenario	-Submerged
-Intersect	-Scholarship	-Pneumonia
-Typhoid	-Malaria	-Ailment

### Lesson Outline:

1. Group students in pairs or triads. You may want weaker readers grouped with a stronger reader.
2. Provide each group with “Doc Harris Background Information” sheet. You may want to read this aloud to class, have them read it with their partner(s), or both.
3. After reading the background information discuss with the class. Make sure to emphasize that Dr. Harris practiced medicine at the turn of the century in an

area that was very rural and removed from conveniences that were modern even for that area. Life was challenging for these pioneers and they were a rugged, hardy bunch of people used to being self sufficient and “Making do on their own”.

4. Inform the class that they will be faced with a series of challenging and exciting situations! They will put themselves in Doc Harris’ place and face some of the very same situations that he did. They must decide what they think Dr. Harris actually did and why. They must also explain why such a condition would most likely not happen today.
5. Provide groups of students with the Doc Harris Series of Challenging Scenarios! sheet.
6. The instructor should keep a copy of the Doc Harris Series of Challenging Scenarios! Response Guide sheet to inform the students how Dr. Harris responded to these typical challenges that he faced.
7. The teacher should face the first challenging scenario with the class to model how the students should respond to that scenario.
8. Student groups should face the rest of the challenging scenarios with their partners. Each time they should explain what they think Doc Harris did, why he responded that way, and why such a situation most likely would not happen in today’s 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

**Extension:**

Have students research their own families to find out where they were born. Have them create family trees. For each relative on the family trees students can write the year, place of birth and facilities born in. Most will have born in hospital facilities but older generations such as grandparents or great-grandparents may have been born at home. If the pupils discover any relatives that were not born in a hospital they can research the circumstances surrounding that birth. Be sensitive to family circumstances regarding any privacy issues.

## **Doc Harris Background Information**

Doctor John Harris was born on April 24, 1888 in Bartow County Georgia. Before becoming a doctor he had several other jobs including a plumber, a stopnet crew member, and trombone player in a band.

He attended medical school at the Southern College of Medicine and Surgery in Atlanta Georgia. It is known now as Emory College. In 1912 he only paid \$5.00 for tuition! He graduated with a medical degree in 1914.

Dr. Harris moved to Wimauma in 1914. At that time Wimauma was not even a town. There were not many roads back then and the ones that existed were sandy, full of underbrush and palmetto scrub. Wild panthers, bobcats, black bears, and wild hogs were commonly seen along them.

In 1927 Doc Harris married Nita Colding. Nita lived with her parents in Picnic. Picnic is a community northwest of Wimauma. Today if you travel along County Route 672 to where it intersects State Route 39 you will know you are in Picnic because of the Picnic Grocery and Convenience store at the northwest corner. They had three daughters, June, Joyce, and Jo.

Dr. Harris was an avid outdoorsman. He would often wake up at 4:00 in the morning to go hunting then open his office at 9:00 a. m. He owned a 640 acre ranch that he loved to hunt on and explore. One year Doc Harris took his family camping in the Everglades for two months. It took 2-3 days to travel there in their Model-A truck.

Dr. Harris passed away on July 2, 1973. His wife Nita passed away on January 15, 1984. He is still fondly remembered in the stories passed down from the early pioneers of the area. He delivered a multitude of longtime residents in the area. Many of the older residents of the South Hillsborough County remember his house calls and assistance in time of illness or injury. In 2008 the Ruskin Community Development Foundation established a scholarship to the Southshore branch of Hillsborough Community College in Dr. Harris' for any student pursuing a degree or training there in the medical profession.





## **Doc Harris Series of Challenging Scenarios! Response Guide**

### **Scenario #1:**

A sick patient desperately needs Dr. John Harris' attention! Dr. Harris saddles up his horse and begins the ride to Sun City. As he approaches the river that must be crossed he notices that the water level is high because of recent rains. Plenty of alligators and poisonous snakes inhabit the river. Trees along the river have fallen in and are submerged and hidden under the water. If the horse stumbles on one of the branches it could mean loss of his valuable medical equipment, injury, or even death to himself or the horse. The patient might not survive without Doc Harris' help! What should he do?

3. What do you think Dr. Harris did in this situation? Why do you think this?

*Dr. Harris regularly crossed rivers and streams in which the water level was as high as the saddle on the horse in order to visit his patients. Yes, the rivers and streams in this area have dangerous alligators and poisonous snakes. Submerged deadfall in the water could cause death or injury to horse and water as well. Dr. Harris was an avid outdoorsman who was used to situations such as this so he was up to the challenge!*

4. Explain why a scenario like this most likely wouldn't occur today.

*In today's world we have cars and busses for transportation to a doctor or medical facility. You would be hard pressed to find a doctor that makes house calls under any situation!*

### **Scenario #2:**

Pneumonia was a common ailment back then, so were typhoid and malaria. Medical technology wasn't as good at treating those illnesses then as now. If someone came down with one of them they were more at risk of death. Doc Harris treated many people with these sicknesses. Many of the people could not pay and Dr. Harris often knew that they couldn't pay before he even arrived at their home.

3. What do you think Dr. Harris did in this situation? Why do you think this?

*Dr. Harris treated people even if he knew they wouldn't be able to pay him for his services, he was that caring of a person. Often a farmer wouldn't have money so he would pay Dr. Harris with vegetables grown on his farm. A fisherman might pay Dr. Harris with fish, a cattle rancher might pay him with steak. In those cases Doc Harris wouldn't get any money for his services but he wouldn't have to purchase food either.*

4. Explain why a scenario like this most likely wouldn't occur today.

*Money is a more common currency now than it was then and fewer people are farmers and fishermen. There are also certain social services that will aid more people who are poor than back then as well.*

### Scenario #3:

A woman is pregnant and is expecting to deliver her baby at any time now. Delivering babies was usually done at home those days. That meant that medicines and medical facilities were not readily available in case of a difficult delivery. A family member walks 7 or 8 miles to inform Dr. Harris of the situation.

3. What do you think Dr. Harris did in this situation? Why do you think this?

*Dr. Harris often moved into the family's home and lived with them in order to be there when the baby arrived. He would deliver the baby and remain at their residence until the mother was healthy enough for him to leave and return home. He normally charged \$35 dollars for delivering children. Sometimes if the family could not afford to pay him for the first baby he delivered they would pay him \$5.00 when he delivered their second child.*

4. Explain why a scenario like this most likely wouldn't occur today.

*We have a much better health care system now than in the early part of the century. Access to hospitals, socialized medicine, emergency care, etc. typically negates the need of a doctor staying with the family in their home in order to deliver a child.*

### Scenario #4:

Ruskin was well removed from cities that had drug stores such as Tampa, Bradenton, and Plant City. It was difficult for residents of the area to get to those places to purchase medicines. Travel along long and rough dirt roads with wild animals was difficult if you had a horse to ride and many people could not afford that. If you were sick and needed medicine in order to get healthy that could be a challenge.

3. What do you think Dr. Harris did in this situation? Why do you think this?

*Doc Harris usually didn't write a prescription because local residents would not be able to get them filled. A traveling drug salesman would come from Tampa every few months or so to supply Dr. Harris with certain medicines. Dr. Harris did develop a medicine of his own that helped treat colitis and a variety of stomach problems.*

4. Explain why a scenario like this most likely wouldn't occur today.

*Medicines and medical facilities are much more widely accessible by the general public. Emergency systems are incorporated extensively across the country.*