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for Literature

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

Christopher Paul Curtis



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How to Use This Literature Guide

Today's standards demand rigor and relevance in the reading of complex texts. The units in this series guide teachers in a rich and deep exploration of worthwhile works of literature for classroom study. The most rigorous instruction can also be interesting and engaging!

Many current strategies for effective literacy instruction have been incorporated into these instructional guides for literature. Throughout the units, text-dependent questions are used to determine comprehension of the book as well as student interpretation of the vocabulary words. The books chosen for the series are complex exemplars of carefully crafted works of literature. Close reading is used throughout the units to guide students toward revisiting the text and using textual evidence to respond to prompts orally and in writing. Students must analyze the story elements in multiple assignments for each section of the book. All of these strategies work together to rigorously guide students through their study of literature.

The next few pages will make clear how to use this guide for a purposeful and meaningful literature study. Each section of this guide is set up in the same way to make it easier for you to implement the instruction in your classroom.

Theme Thoughts

The great works of literature used throughout this series have important themes that have been relevant to people for many years. Many of the themes will be discussed during the various sections of this instructional guide. However, it would also benefit students to have independent time to think about the key themes of the novel.

Before students begin reading, have them complete *Pre-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 13). This graphic organizer will allow students to think about the themes outside the context of the story. They'll have the opportunity to evaluate statements based on important themes and defend their opinions. Be sure to have students keep their papers for comparison to the *Post-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 64). This graphic organizer is similar to the pre-reading activity. However, this time, students will be answering the questions from the point of view of one of the characters of the novel. They have to think about how the character would feel about each statement and defend their thoughts. To conclude the activity, have students compare what they thought about the themes before they read the novel to what the characters discovered during the story.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Vocabulary

Each teacher overview page has definitions and sentences about how key vocabulary words are used in the section. These words should be introduced and discussed with students. There are two student vocabulary activity pages in each section. On the first page, students are asked to define the ten words chosen by the author of this unit. On the second page in most sections, each student will select at least eight words that he or she finds interesting or difficult. For each section, choose one of these pages for your students to complete. With either assignment, you may want to have students get into pairs to discuss the meanings of the words. Allow students to use reference guides to define the words. Monitor students to make sure the definitions they have found are accurate and relate to how the words are used in the text.

On some of the vocabulary student pages, students are asked to answer text-related questions about the vocabulary words. The following question stems will help you create your own vocabulary questions if you'd like to extend the discussion.

- How does this word describe _____'s character?
- In what ways does this word relate to the problem in this story?
- How does this word help you understand the setting?
- In what ways is this word related to the story's solution?
- Describe how this word supports the novel's theme of
- What visual images does this word bring to your mind?
- For what reasons might the author have chosen to use this particular word?

At times, more work with the words will help students understand their meanings. The following quick vocabulary activities are a good way to further study the words.

- Have students practice their vocabulary and writing skills by creating sentences and/or paragraphs in which multiple vocabulary words are used correctly and with evidence of understanding.
- Students can play vocabulary concentration. Students make a set of cards with the words and a separate set of cards with the definitions. Then, students lay the cards out on the table and play concentration. The goal of the game is to match vocabulary words with their definitions.
- Students can create word journal entries about the words. Students choose words they think are important and then describe why they think each word is important within the novel.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Analyzing the Literature

After students have read each section, hold small-group or whole-class discussions. Questions are written at two levels of complexity to allow you to decide which questions best meet the needs of your students. The Level 1 questions are typically less abstract than the Level 2 questions. Level 1 is indicated by a square, while Level 2 is indicated by a triangle. These questions focus on the various story elements, such as character, setting, and plot. Student pages are provided if you want to assign these questions for individual student work before your group discussion. Be sure to add further questions as your students discuss what they've read. For each question, a few key points are provided for your reference as you discuss the novel with students.

Reader Response

In today's classrooms, there are often great readers who are below average writers. So much time and energy is spent in classrooms getting students to read on grade level, that little time is left to focus on writing skills. To help teachers include more writing in their daily literacy instruction, each section of this guide has a literature-based reader response prompt. Each of the three genres of writing is used in the reader responses within this guide: narrative, informative/explanatory, and argument. Students have a choice between two prompts for each reader response. One response requires students to make connections between the reading and their own lives. The other prompt requires students to determine text-to-text connections or connections within the text.

Close Reading the Literature

Within each section, students are asked to closely reread a short section of text. Since some versions of the novels have different page numbers, the selections are described by chapter and location, along with quotations to guide the readers. After each close reading, there are text-dependent questions to be answered by students.

Encourage students to read each question one at a time and then go back to the text and discover the answer. Work with students to ensure that they use the text to determine their answers rather than making unsupported inferences. Once students have answered the questions, discuss what they discovered. Suggested answers are provided in the answer key.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Close Reading the Literature *(cont.)*

The generic, open-ended stems below can be used to write your own text-dependent questions if you would like to give students more practice.

- Give evidence from the text to support
- Justify your thinking using text evidence about
- Find evidence to support your conclusions about
- What text evidence helps the reader understand . . . ?
- Use the book to tell why _____ happens.
- Based on events in the story,
- Use text evidence to describe why

Making Connections

The activities in this section help students make cross-curricular connections to writing, mathematics, science, social studies, or the fine arts. Each of these types of activities requires higher-order thinking skills from students.

Creating with the Story Elements

It is important to spend time discussing the common story elements in literature. Understanding the characters, setting, and plot can increase students' comprehension and appreciation of the story. If teachers discuss these elements daily, students will more likely internalize the concepts and look for the elements in their independent reading. Another important reason for focusing on the story elements is that students will be better writers if they think about how the stories they read are constructed.

Students are given three options for working with the story elements. They are asked to create something related to the characters, setting, or plot of the novel. Students are given a choice on this activity so that they can decide to complete the activity that most appeals to them. Different multiple intelligences are used so that the activities are diverse and interesting to all students.

Analyzing the Literature

Provided below are discussion questions you can use in small groups, with the whole class, or for written assignments. Each question is given at two levels so you can choose the right question for each group of students. Activity sheets with these questions are provided (pages 18–19) if you want students to write their responses. For each question, a few key discussion points are provided for your reference.

Story Element	■ Level 1	▲ Level 2	Key Discussion Points
Setting	Describe the impact of the weather on the family in chapter 1. Who is most affected?	How does the author ensure that you fully understand the weather in Flint? Describe how the weather is almost like a character in the story.	The family is very cold, and Momma reminds Dad of her sacrifice in moving north. The author describes how one's breath freezes, how cold it is in the house, and how Byron gets stuck to the car mirror. The weather triggers events that contribute to the humor, helping with the understanding of the characters.
Character	How does Kenny react to Byron getting stuck to the mirror?	What do we learn about each member of the family when Byron gets stuck to the mirror?	Kenny is amused, but he also worries about Byron getting hurt. We know that Byron must be a bit vain and is also eager to escape his share of work. Dad thinks it is all quite funny, and Joey is very worried. Momma is worried, but also very practical, pulling Byron off the mirror.
Character	What two things make Kenny likely to be teased by other kids?	Why is it good for Kenny that Byron is the "god" of the school? How does Byron help Kenny?	Kenny loves to read and is very good at it. He is even used as an example to older students. Kenny has a lazy eye, which can lead to teasing. Byron admires Kenny's reading, thereby ensuring that the teasing is minimal. He also gives Kenny strategies for minimizing the effect of his lazy eye on others.
Plot	Why does Byron end up bullying the bully—Larry Dunn—in chapter 4?	Kenny's gloves play an important part in chapter 4. What do they tell you about Kenny, about Larry Dunn, and about Byron?	Kenny shows great compassion by sharing his gloves with Rufus. Larry shows his meanness by stealing them and his foolishness in trying to disguise them with shoe polish. Byron shows his sense of justice and his love for his brother.

Analyzing the Literature

Directions: Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. Describe the impact of the weather on the family in chapter 1. Who is most affected?

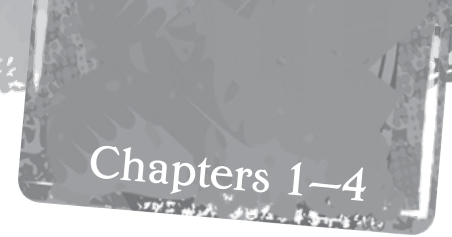
2. How does Kenny react to Byron getting stuck to the mirror?

3. What two things make Kenny likely to be teased by other kids?

4. Why does Byron end up bullying the bully—Larry Dunn—in chapter 4?

Name _____

Date _____



▲ Analyzing the Literature

Directions: Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. How does the author ensure that you fully understand the weather in Flint? Describe how the weather is almost like a character in the story.

2. What do we learn about each member of the family when Byron gets stuck to the mirror?

3. Why is it good for Kenny that Byron is the “god” of the school? How does Byron help Kenny?

4. Kenny’s gloves play an important part in chapter 4. What do they tell you about Kenny, about Larry Dunn, and about Byron?

Name _____

Date _____

Close Reading the Literature

Directions: Closely reread the first five paragraphs of chapter 4. Read each question and then revisit the text to find evidence that supports your answer.

1. Give evidence from the text to explain why Momma is said to know nothing about cold weather.

2. Describe the clothing that Kenny and Joey have to wear to stay warm as described in the text.

3. What part of the text supports the idea that wearing all the clothes is humiliating?

4. Use the novel to describe why Kenny doesn't mind Joey's smell.

Name _____

Date _____

Creating with the Story Elements

Directions: Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you’ve read so far. Be creative and have fun!

Characters

Create a chart that provides a family profile based on what you have learned about Momma, Dad, Byron, Kenny, and Joetta. List at least three characteristics for each character.

Setting

Create a cartoon sequence that shows the episode of Byron getting stuck on the car’s mirror. Make clear from the series of pictures the role that the weather plays in setting up the sequence of events.

Plot

The novel’s story is told from Kenny’s point of view. Rewrite a pivotal scene from Byron’s point of view.