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Hawker Brownlow Education

INTRODUCTION

Read through today's common curricular goals for "reading literature" and you will find that the work expected of students is expressed using such academic terminology as *describe*, *determine*, *develop*, *support* and *cite*. Requirements such as these cannot be met via the comprehension-question worksheets and culminating quizzes that have long been the staples of literature guides designed for classroom use. The primary objective of those traditional activities was to make sure that students were keeping track of what was happening in the section of the novel that they had just read. Very little rigour and synthesis was asked of students – and usually none until the entire novel was read.

From a teacher's standpoint, this style of classroom analysis misses multiple opportunities to delve deeply into the details that make a specific piece of literature a classic. From a student's standpoint, this way to reflect on literature is monotonous and inflexible, and it fails to nurture the momentum experienced when one is invested in a compelling work of art. That is why the guides in the *Rigorous Reading* series aim to do much more: they aim to transform the reading of a great novel into a journey of discovery for students.

Instead of merely asking students what happened in any given section, this resource asks questions that require closer reading and deeper analysis – questions such as, "Why did the author choose to include this information?" and "How does this information further the plot or offer more insight into the themes, characters, settings, etc.?" And instead of waiting until the end of the novel to put the pieces of the puzzle in place, students will learn to add to and alter their understanding of the novel as *they are reading it*. The various activities in this resource systematically prompt students to consider and appreciate the many ingredients the author has combined to form the novel as a whole.

A CUSTOM RESOURCE

This in-depth guide has been written specifically for Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*. The lessons and activities have been structured and scaffolded to maximise the experience of reading and teaching this novel.

To prepare your students for their reading of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, utilise the **novel information** and **pre-reading activities** included on pages 7–9 of this guide. Included in this section is information about the book and its author, along with activities designed to acclimate students to the themes and concepts present in the book they are about to read.

This resource provides activities that help foster comprehension and reinforce knowledge of literary elements as students read the novel. These **section activities** allow students the opportunity to process short sections of the novel individually, laying a strong foundation for their ability to engage more deeply with the chapters to come. For each section of the novel, students will complete individual and collaborative activities that encourage close reading, referencing textual evidence and drawing their own conclusions about the text.

Additionally, this resource provides students with another avenue through which they can reflect on recurring literary elements while also connecting personally with the novel. Each student maintains his or her own **Interactive Novel Log**, using it as a way to consider and then reconsider various aspects of the novel.

Upon completion of the entire novel, students can synthesise their ideas about the novel by completing several individual and/or collaborative **post-reading activities** (pages 53–73). This section of the resource includes such larger assignments as group projects and essay prompts.

Glossaries located at the back of this guide give students access to annotated lists of literary terms (page 74) and themes common to children's and young-adult literature (page 75).

At the end of this guide, an **answer key** is provided for activities that require specific answers.

Teacher Tips

For a description of Interactive Novel Logs and how to use them in your classroom, see page 5 of this guide.

An ideal way to use this resource would be to follow the complete lesson plan given on page 6 of this guide.

The use of multiple texts can help build and extend knowledge about a theme or topic. It can also illustrate the similarities and differences in how multiple authors approach similar content or how an individual author approaches multiple novels. See the bottom of page 7 for suggestions about using this novel as part of a text set.

When teaching other novels in your classroom, consider using the specific ideas and also the general approach presented in this resource. Ask students to mine small sections of a novel for clues to theme and characterisation. Examine the craft, structure and purpose of select passages. Explore inferences and encourage connections.

This guide is designed for use in years 4–6. This levelling has been determined through the consideration of various educational metrics. However, teacher discretion should be used to determine if the novel and guide are appropriate for lower or higher year levels, as well.

NOVEL INFORMATION

Book Summary

Set in the U.S. state of Michigan during the early 1960s, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* tells the story of 9-year-old Kenny Watson, a middle child in a family of five. Kenny's father is the entertaining one, his mother is the responsible one, and his little sister is the sweet and innocent one. It is Kenny's "juvenile delinquent" older brother, Byron, who is the family's biggest source of "adventures". His actions greatly influence Kenny, and often they terrorise him, as well. When Byron's disobedience and defiance become too much, Daniel and Wilona Watson plan a family road trip to deliver their oldest son down South to the stern Grandma Sands. Once there, their paths cross with a historical and unimaginable event.

This award-winning novel shows us the everyday joys, struggles and fears of an intelligent, impressionable boy as he attempts to navigate his way through a maze of small-town troubles (like brothers and bullies) and big-world worries (like racism and mortality). Through Kenny's eyes we see a seemingly safe and familiar world that sometimes gives us a glimpse of an underlying meanness and menace.

About the Author

Christopher Paul Curtis grew up in Flint, Michigan, during the 1950s and '60s, and he has set many of his novels in this city. Curtis spent his early adult life working on an assembly line, hanging doors on cars in a Flint automobile factory. In his spare time he wrote, and in 1996 he was able to publish his first novel: *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*. This novel earned Curtis immediate acclaim. He would go on to write several beloved children's novels, the most decorated of which have been 1999's *Bud, Not Buddy* (winner of the Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott King Award) and 2007's *Elijah of Buxton* (named a Newbery Honor Book and winner of the Coretta Scott King Award). In his novels, Curtis often infuses warmth and humour into his portrayal of dark, difficult times in U.S. history.

Make It a Text Set!

The following novels can form ideal text sets with *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*. (**Note:** Check books in advance to ensure that they are appropriate for your students.)

Other Books by Christopher Paul Curtis	Books by Other Authors
<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> (1999) <i>Bucking the Sarge</i> (2004) <i>Elijah of Buxton</i> (2007) <i>The Mighty Miss Malone</i> (2012)	<i>One Crazy Summer</i> by Rita Williams-Garcia (2010) <i>The Lions of Little Rock</i> by Kristin Levine (2012) <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> by Jacqueline Woodson (2014) <i>The Crossover</i> by Kwame Alexander (2015)

INTERACTIVE NOVEL LOGS

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

As students read through *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, have them use the following activities to track the growth and development of certain literary elements. For each activity:

- ✦ Distribute a fresh copy to students after each section is read.
- ✦ Have students include these completed worksheets in their Interactive Novel Logs. See page 5 for more information.
- ✦ Have students refer to these completed worksheets when completing the “Add It Up” activity on pages 55–57 (see *Post-Reading Activities*).



Activity: “Sum It Up”

Page #: 12

Focus: Plot

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Practise summarisation skills by listing the major plot points of the section just read. For each chapter in this section of the novel, create and defend a new, shorter title.

Activity: “Novel Vocabulary”

Page #: 13

Focus: Vocabulary

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Use the top part of page to record interesting or unfamiliar words from the section. Use the bottom part of page to highlight one word from the section. Determine the word’s meaning and part of speech, use it in a new sentence and draw a picture to illustrate its meaning.

Activity: “The Main Character”

Page #: 14

Focus: Characterisation, Plot

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Describe what happens to Kenny in each section of the novel, and also give examples of his thoughts and actions toward other characters. Consider his growth within each section of the novel.

Activity: “The Voice of the Novel”

Page #: 15

Focus: Characterisation, Craft

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Describe the novel’s narrative voice in each section of the novel, and give examples to support this description. In each section, locate a quote and rewrite it in a different narrative voice. Explain how the voice used by the author fits the novel and how a different voice would have changed the novel.

Activity: “Major Minors”

Page #: 16

Focus: Characterisation, Plot

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Highlight several minor characters who play important roles in each section of the novel. Explain what we learn about these characters in each section, whether they change or grow as characters and how they affect or influence the novel’s main character.

Teacher Tip: Before students work on this activity, be sure they understand the difference between a dynamic character (one that changes and grows) and a static character (one that remains consistent throughout the novel).

Activity: "Another Voice"

Page #: 17

Focus: Voice, Characterisation

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Rethink a scene from the chapter by writing it in the voice (and from the perspective) of a character other than Kenny. Defend writing with evidence from the novel.

Activity: "Following a Few Themes"

Page #: 18

Focus: Theme

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Show how three themes are important to each section of the novel. Use evidence to support all claims. For each section of the novel, choose a fourth theme to discuss.

Teacher Tip: Distribute the "Common Literary Themes" handout (page 75) and allow each student to write about a theme of his or her choice.

Activity: "Conflicts of Interest"

Page #: 19

Focus: Conflict, Plot

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Use evidence to show how two different types of conflicts are woven into this section of the novel.

Teacher Tip: Prior to using this activity for the first section of the novel, consider providing examples of each type of conflict highlighted on page 19. These examples may come from real life or from appropriate books, films, TV shows, etc. You may also wish to introduce students to the Person vs. Nature conflict and allow them to search the section for this type of conflict.

Activity: "Making the Mood"

Page #: 20

Focus: Mood, Craft

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Choose an important scene from each section of the novel. Determine how the author combines five literary elements (plot, setting, characterisation, voice and dialogue) to create the mood of this scene.

Activity: "Storyboarding a Scene"

Page #: 21

Focus: Plot, Craft

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Choose an interesting scene from each section of the novel. Create a storyboard to visually represent six moments from this scene. Explain why this scene lends itself well to this treatment.

Teacher Tip: Prior to using this activity for the first section of the novel, consider showing students examples of storyboarding techniques. Conduct an Internet image search in order to find appropriate examples.

Activity: "I Predict"

Page #: 22

Focus: Plot, Mood, Characterisation

Learning Type: Individual

Description: Make two predictions about where the novel's plot will go next. Support and defend predictions.

Teacher Tip: This page should be completed as a part of the "Log-In" activity that concludes Sections I-IV. Consider using the "Pitch the Sequel" activity on page 70 to have students predict future events in the lives of the novel's characters.
