

# ***House of Dies Drear* by Virginia Hamilton (Published by Aladdin)**

Approved for use in Communication Arts, Grade 6

## **Summary**

This book is exciting with many turns. It involves a huge, old house with secret tunnels, a cantankerous caretaker, and a buried treasure. The fact that the house might be haunted only adds to its appeal. As soon as his family moves in, Thomas senses something strange about the Civil War era house, which used to be a critical stop on the Underground Railroad. With the help of his father, he learns about the abolitionists and escaping slaves who kept the Underground Railroad running. On his own, he explores the hidden passageways in and under the house, piecing clues together in an increasingly dangerous quest for the truth about the past. Newbery medalist Virginia Hamilton creates a heart-pounding adventure for sixth-grade readers.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

*The House of Dies Drear* has many themes including slavery, the Underground Railroad, family, determination, history, and racial identification. On one level, *The House of Dies Drear* presents a suspenseful mystery story complete with ghosts, secret passageways, and buried treasure. On a deeper level, it follows the lessons learned by young Thomas Small as he confronts his own prejudice toward a strange old man and the perceived prejudice he feels as a newcomer to a small town. On a deeper level still, the story serves as the backdrop for a fascinating glimpse into the Underground Railway and the unique historical treasures of African American culture. The novel provides a rich source of study of the literary devices, themes, culture, and history.

## **Standards**

### **Course Objectives (Benchmarks)**

**Reading:** 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1- The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text. 2.2- The students understand the significance of literature and its contributions to various cultures.

### **Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)**

#### **Reading:**

1.4.3- The student uses prior knowledge, content, text type and text features to make, revise, and confirm predictions

1.4.4- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after the reading of the text.

1.4.5- The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions.

1.4.9- The student identifies characteristics of narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive texts.

1.4.11- The student identifies and describes the author's purpose (e.g. to inform, to give directions, to entertain) and basic techniques the author uses to achieve that purpose.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.1- The student describes different aspects of major and minor characters (e.g. their physical traits, personality traits, feelings, actions, motives) and explains how those aspects influence characters' interactions with other characters and elements of the plot, including resolution of the major conflict.

2.1.2- The student identifies and describes the setting (e.g., environment, time of day or year, historical period, situation, place) and explains the importance of the setting to the story or literary text.

2.1.3- The student identifies major and minor events related to the conflict in a story (e.g., crisis/turning moment, climax, resolution) and explains how one event gives rise to another.

2.1.4- The student understands aspects of theme (e.g. moral, lesson, meaning, message, author's ideas about the subject) and supports with implicit and/or explicit information from the text.

2.1.5- The student understands the use of literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback).

## **A Note on the Text**

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

*This modern-day murder mystery involves a ghost. It also includes references to the slave trade and the Underground Railroad, including discussion of the racial struggles of the time. All of this information is revealed through the historical aspect of the secrets of the house.*

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities