

The Watsons Go To Birmingham-1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis (Published by Delacorte Press)

Approved for use in Communication Arts, Grade 7

Summary

This novel tells the story of the “Weird Watson” family and the humorous events that occur to them in Flint, Michigan, in 1963. After one too many “adventures” by the oldest son, Byron, the parents decide to take a family trip to Birmingham, Alabama, to visit the children’s grandmother and hopefully encourage Byron to change his ways. On their way to Alabama and while in Alabama, the Watson children learn that life is different for African Americans in the South.

Connection to the Curriculum

This book is a great example of how characters affect the plot of a story. Students will explore how the story would change if the characters reacted differently to events in the plot, in particular the bombing of the church. Students can also explore how the setting of a story (northern United States vs. southern United States in the early 1960’s) impacts the events and reactions of characters in the story. This novel examines how our choices have consequences, not only for ourselves, but others as well.

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:

1.3.5- The student determines the meaning of words or phrases using context clues from sentences or paragraphs.

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

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

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

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

1.4.17- The student compares and contrasts varying aspects (e.g., characters’ traits and motives, themes, problem-solution, cause-effect relationships, ideas and concepts, procedures, viewpoints) in one or more appropriate-level texts.

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 analyzes connections between the setting and other story elements (e.g., character, plot).

2.1.3- The student identifies major and minor elements of the plot (e.g., conflict, crisis/turning moment, climax, resolution, rising action, falling action, subplots, parallel episodes) and explains how these elements relate 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/explicit information from the text.

2.1.5- The student identifies the use of literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, figurative language, irony, metaphor, tone/mood, symbolism).

2.2.9- The student recognizes connections between cultures and experiences through a variety of texts.

A Note on the Text

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

The Watson family faces issues such as bullying, violence, and racism. This warm and often humorous text carefully examines the realities of the civil rights movement.

Additional Unit Design

Connections

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities