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Read through today's national or state standards 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 rigor 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 maximize the experience of reading and teaching this novel.

To prepare your students for their reading of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, utilize 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 synthesize 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, and a list identifies how each activity correlates to **standards**.

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 characterization. Examine the craft, structure, and purpose of select passages. Explore inferences and encourage connections.

This guide is designed for use in grades 4–6, and the standards correlations on pages 79–80 reflect this range. This leveling 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 grades, as well.

KEEPING NOVEL LOGS

Great works of literature are complex texts, and complex texts are multilayered. They enrich and reveal as they go along. Successful readers are those who “go along” with the novel, too. Interactive Novel Logs give students a place and a space to record their thoughts and observations as they journey through the book. After each section of the novel is read, students use their Interactive Novel Logs to track the introduction and development of such literary elements as plot, setting, theme, characterization, craft, and structure, while also choosing their own ways to connect the novel to their own life experiences.

Materials needed for each student:

- ✦ a three-ring binder or presentation folder
- ✦ a sheet of plain paper for the title page
- ✦ two or three sheets of lined paper for a Table of Contents
- ✦ several extra sheets of paper (both lined and plain) for student’s responses to the “Ideas for Your Interactive Novel Log” prompts at the end of each section

Teacher Tip

One Interactive Novel Log can be kept for multiple novels, in which case a larger three-ring binder will be needed. If it will be used only for the activities included in this guide for *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, a ½-inch binder or presentation folder will be adequate.

Assembling the Interactive Novel Log:

1. On the plain paper, allow students to design and decorate their own title pages. Have them write “Interactive Novel Log” and “*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*” in the middle of the page. They should include their name and grade at the bottom.
2. Add blank lined paper for the Table of Contents. Have students write “Table of Contents” at the top. They will add to this list as they create new pages.
3. Before reading each section of the novel, photocopy and distribute new copies of the Interactive Novel Log worksheets (pages 12–22). Directions for completing these activities can be found in the “Teacher Instructions” on pages 10–11.
4. For the final activity in each section, photocopy and distribute the “Section Log-In” page for the section. Follow the directions given. Students begin by completing a copy of the “I Predict” worksheet (page 22), which asks them to predict what will happen next in the novel. Students then select one or more of the prompts in the “Ideas for Your Interactive Novel Log” section, and they create an Interactive Novel Log page that responds to that topic.
5. After the class has completed the entire novel and the post-reading activities, you may have students include the “My Book Rating” worksheet (page 71) as a final entry in their Interactive Novel Logs.

Teacher Tip

Consider allowing your students to preview the “Ideas for Your Interactive Novel Log” prompts a day or two before they are asked to respond to them. When asking students to reflect on past experiences and articulate their personal connections to a work of art, give them the time and space they need to collect their thoughts. By allowing your students to sit with the ideas presented in these prompts, you will relieve the pressure an immediate response can cause.

NAME: _____

READY, AIM, FIRE!

When somebody does something that will get that person the wrong kind of attention, Kenny says it's as if that person is tied to a tree and the words "Ready, aim, fire!" are said.

1. What does Kenny mean by, "Ready, aim, fire!"? Does what he means have anything to do with shooting a gun? Explain.

2. On the playground at school, Rufus points out a squirrel to Kenny. How does Rufus say that Michigan squirrels are different than Arkansas squirrels? Complete these sentences:

Michigan squirrels are _____ because _____

Arkansas squirrels are _____ because _____

3. Check the box beside the correct answer.

- a. Which of these have adapted to a harsh environment and are harder to hurt?

☐ Michigan squirrels

☐ Arkansas squirrels

- b. Which of these have not adapted to a harsh environment and are easier prey?

☐ Michigan squirrels

☐ Arkansas squirrels

4. A **metaphor** is a literary device used by authors. A metaphor directly compares two things that are unlike in most ways.

- a. Name a character who is like an Arkansas squirrel in the environment of Clark Elementary. Explain your choice.

- b. Name a character who is like a Michigan squirrel in the environment of Clark Elementary. Explain your choice.

Section II
Chapters 4–6

NAME: _____

PROTECTING EACH OTHER

In this section of the novel, there are several examples of members of the Watson family protecting each other. Find three examples and complete the chart.

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Which character is doing the protecting?			
Which character is being protected?			
From what (or whom) is this character being protected? Give details.			
How do you think the person feels about being protected? Use evidence from the novel to support your answer.			

Practice Speaking and Listening: Meet with a partner to discuss your charts. Talk about the following questions:

- ✦ Did you each come up with the same three examples?
- ✦ Do you agree with each other's answers?
- ✦ Which character was the most effective in protecting others? Why?
- ✦ Which character was the least effective in protecting others? Why?

On the back of this paper, write a summary of your discussion. Include your partner's name in your summary.

