



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

Black Boy

based on the book by

Richard Wright

Written by

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A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Richard Wright

WRIGHT, Richard (1908-1960). The American author Richard Wright pictured with brutal realism what it meant to be black in a white society. His writings speak with the raw voice of an anguish not often evident in novels.

Richard Nathaniel Wright was born on Sept. 4, 1908, on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi. His father was a mill hand, and his mother taught in a country school. Young Wright's childhood was generally one of poverty, frustration, and despair. When he was 5, his father left the family, and when he was not yet 10, his mother became paralyzed. He was sent to live with relatives. At 15 he left home and for several years drifted from one city to another, working at whatever jobs he could find. In Chicago he worked nights in the post office. Days he spent reading and writing. During the depression of the 1930's, he lost his job and had to go on relief. Not long afterward he joined the Communist party, as did thousands of other young Americans at the time.

In 1937 Wright moved to New York City, where he worked on a Federal Writers' Project. His first published book, *Uncle Tom's Children*, appeared in 1938. It was a collection of four stories dealing with racial prejudice and violence in the South. But it was Wright's novel *Black Boy* (1940) that brought him world fame. This powerful story of a Chicago black driven to crime was made into a play by Wright and Paul Green. It was successfully staged in 1941.

Wright's first marriage--to a ballet dancer--ended in divorce. In 1941 he married Ellen Poplar of New York City, and they had two daughters. Wright became increasingly disillusioned with the Communist party and finally left it. In 1945 he published *Black Boy*, an autobiography of his childhood and youth. It confirmed him as a major American writer.

His discontent with American society persisted. As a youth he had experienced not only hardship but vicious racial prejudice as well, and as a man he continued to encounter it. In 1946 he and his white wife left the United States to live in Paris.

Wright wrote several novels during the next 14 years, but they were not well received. He also wrote some travel books and other nonfiction. On November 28, 1960, he died in Paris of a heart attack.

---- Courtesy of Compton's Learning Company

INTRODUCTION

This unit has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, and language skills through exercises and activities related to *Black Boy* by Richard Wright. It includes eighteen lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** introduces students to some background to the novel through a writing and bulletin board activity. Following the introductory activity, students are given a transition to explain how the activity relates to the book they are about to read. Following the transition, students are given the materials they will be using during the unit. At the end of the lesson, students begin the pre-reading work for the first reading assignment.

The **reading assignments** are approximately thirty pages in length. Some are a little shorter and others are a little longer depending on where the chapter divisions are. Students have approximately 20 minutes of pre-reading work to do prior to each reading assignment. This pre-reading work involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing some vocabulary work for 8 to 10 vocabulary words they will encounter in their reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact-based questions; students can find the answers to these questions right in the text. These questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple choice. The best use of these materials is probably to use the short answer version of the questions as study guides for students (since answers will be more complete), and to use the multiple choice version for occasional quizzes. If your school has the appropriate equipment, it might be a good idea to make transparencies of your answer keys for the overhead projector.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies as well as to aid in the students' understanding of the book. Prior to each reading assignment, students will complete a two-part worksheet for approximately 8 to 10 vocabulary words in the upcoming reading assignment. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students are then to write down what they think the words mean based on the words' usage. Part II nails down the definitions of the words by giving students dictionary definitions of the words and having students match the words to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have a thorough understanding of the words when they meet them in the text.

After each reading assignment, students will go back and formulate answers for the study guide questions. Discussion of these questions serves as a **review** of the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

After students complete reading the work, there is a **vocabulary review** lesson which pulls together all of the fragmented vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and gives students a review of all of the words they have studied.

A lesson is devoted to the **extra discussion questions/writing assignments**. These questions focus on interpretation, critical analysis and personal response, employing a variety of thinking skills and adding to the students' understanding of the novel.

There is a **group activity** in which students work in small groups to discuss symbolism, imagery and themes from the novel.

The group activity is followed by a **reports and discussion** session in which the groups share their ideas about the themes with the entire class; thus, the entire class is exposed to information about all of the themes and the entire class can discuss each theme based on the nucleus of information brought forth by each of the groups.

There are three **writing assignments** in this unit, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or having students express personal opinions. The first assignment is to have students express their own opinions: students write a composition in which they tell what ideas and themes they think Richard Wright would put in a book called *Black Boy* today. The second assignment is to inform: students write a report in which they organize and compose the information they plan to give for their oral presentations relating to the **unit project**. The third assignment is to persuade: students write a persuasive composition of their own choice.

The **unit project** is in five parts. Students are assigned one of the authors Richard mentions after he has read the Mencken books. Students take the author, find out what Mencken said about the author, read biographical information about the author, read something the author has written, and read some critics' articles evaluating the author's work. Following the research and the related writing assignment, students each give an oral presentation. This project also doubles as a **nonfiction reading assignment**.

The **review lesson** pulls together all of the aspects of the unit. The teacher is given four or five choices of activities or games to use which all serve the same basic function of reviewing all of the information presented in the unit.

The **unit test** comes in two formats: multiple choice or short answer. As a convenience, two different tests for each format have been included. There is also an advanced short answer test for students who need more of a challenge.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **extra activities section** includes suggestions for an in-class library, crossword and word search puzzles related to the novel, and extra vocabulary worksheets. There is a list of **bulletin board ideas** which gives the teacher suggestions for bulletin boards to go along with this unit. In addition, there is a list of **extra class activities** the teacher could choose from to enhance the unit or as a substitution for an exercise the teacher might feel is inappropriate for his/her class. **Answer keys** are located directly after the **reproducible student materials** throughout the unit. Only the student materials may be reproduced for use in the teacher's classroom without infringement of copyrights.

UNIT OBJECTIVES - *Black Boy*

1. Through reading *Black Boy* students will consider the importance of judging people as individuals rather than as members of groups.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical and personal.
3. Students will study the theme of man's search for his own identity and the conflicts within himself as well as those imposed by society.
4. Students will be given the opportunity to practice reading aloud and silently to improve their skills in each area.
5. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters in *Black Boy* as they relate to the author's theme development.
6. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with the novel.
7. The writing assignments in this unit are geared to several purposes:
 - a. To have students demonstrate their abilities to inform, to persuade, or to express their own personal ideas
NOTE: Students will demonstrate ability to write effectively to inform by developing and organizing facts to convey information. Students will demonstrate the ability to write effectively to persuade by selecting and organizing relevant information, establishing an argumentative purpose, and by designing an appropriate strategy for an identified audience. Students will demonstrate the ability to write effectively to express personal ideas by selecting a form and its appropriate elements.
 - b. To check the students' reading comprehension
 - c. To make students think about the ideas presented by the novel
 - d. To encourage logical thinking
 - e. To provide an opportunity to practice good grammar and improve students' use of the English language.
8. Students will read aloud, report, and participate in large and small group discussions to improve their public speaking and personal interaction skills.

READING ASSIGNMENT SHEET - *Black Boy*

Date Assigned	Assignment	Completion Date
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5-6	
	7-8	
	9-11	
	12-14	

UNIT OUTLINE - *Black Boy*

1	2	3	4	5
Introduction PV 1	Read 1 PV 2	Study ?s 1 Read 2 PV 3	Study ?s 2 Read 3 PVR 4	Study ?s 3 Writing Assignment #1 PVR 5-6
6	7	8	9	10
Library - Nonfiction Reading	Study ?s 4-6 Project Work PVR 7-8	Study ?s 7-8 Writing Assignment #2 PVR 9-11	Study ?s 9-11 PVR 12-14	Study ?s 12-14 Extra ?s
11	12	13	14	15
Vocabulary	Group Activity	Group Reports & Discussion	Nonfiction Reports	Nonfiction Reports
16	17	18		
Writing Assignment #3	Review	Test		

P=Preview Study Questions V=Prereading Vocabulary Worksheets R=Read

LESSON ONE

Objectives

1. To introduce the *Black Boy* unit.
2. To distribute books and other related materials
3. To preview the study questions for Book One
4. To familiarize students with the vocabulary for Book One

NOTE: Prior to this lesson, tell students to bring in a photo of themselves. You also need a sheet of construction paper for each student. Prepare a bulletin board with background paper and a title: AU-TO-BI-OG-RA-PHY n., pl. -phies. THE STORY OF A PERSON'S LIFE WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

Activity #1

Have students write short autobiographies of themselves (1-2 paragraphs). They should include when and where they were born, a little about their parent(s), and the main events that have happened in their lives from the time they were born to the present time.

Students should paste, tape, or staple their pictures onto the top center of the construction paper and then write a "good copy" of their autobiographies under the pictures.

Have students post their autobiographical sketches on a bulletin board or vacant wall in your classroom. If you have no classroom, or if you prefer, you could collect all of the autobiographical sketches, compile them into a booklet, and print (photocopy) a copy of the booklet for everyone in your class to have.

TRANSITION: Explain that the book you are about to read, *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, is autobiographical in nature.

Activity #2

Distribute the materials students will use in this unit. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides Students should read the study guide questions for each reading assignment prior to beginning the reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in the section they are about to read. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials for the unit test.

Vocabulary Prior to reading a reading assignment, students will do vocabulary work related to the section of the book they are about to read. Following the completion of the reading of the book, there will be a vocabulary review of all the words used in the vocabulary assignments. Students should keep their vocabulary work as study materials for the unit test.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 - *Black Boy*

PROMPT

Through the novel, *Black Boy*, Richard Wright not only gives a portrait of his own life but also gives us a vivid picture of what it meant to grow up as a black boy in the South after the Civil War but prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Regardless of the skin color, readers of this book are exposed to a powerful, moving story of a young boy's struggle to find and maintain his own individuality in a world seemingly set to cast and keep him in a stereotypical role. We know that Richard grew up, moved North, *did* maintain his individuality, and became a respected American writer. He continued to be dissatisfied with his life in the United States, though, and moved his residence to Europe.

How would Richard Wright feel about living in the United States today? What do you think he would write in a novel called *Black Boy* about a black boy growing up in the United States *today*? Your assignment is to write a composition in which you answer that question.

PREWRITING

Your first step is to stop and think. Brainstorm a list of ideas and impressions you have as an immediate response to the question. Jot them down. Now think a little longer and a little deeper. What are your second thoughts about the things you have written down and second responses to the question? Jot them down.

Look at what you have written. What things are the most important to characterize life for a black boy today? Place a star next to them. What are all the other things you have written? Choose a few of those items that you think would be important points in a present-day *Black Boy* book. Put a dash next to them. Scratch out the phrases and ideas that would really not have a place in the book.

Next to each of the items on your list (the * or -- items), write down a few notes explaining what you mean and why you believe each would be included in the book.

DRAFTING

Write a paragraph in which you introduce the idea that if Richard Wright were writing *Black Boy* today, he would include . . . (insert your main points).

In the body of your composition, write one paragraph for each of the items on your list. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence and be filled out with explanations, examples, and reasons why you believe these things would be included in the book.

Write a concluding paragraph in which you give your final thoughts and bring your composition to a close.