



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963

based on the book by
Christopher Paul Curtis

Written by
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ISBN 978-1-60249-269-1

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A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Paul Curtis

Christopher Paul Curtis was born and raised in Flint, Michigan (the setting for *Bud, Not Buddy* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*). After graduating from school, he worked on the assembly line of the Fisher Body Flint Plant 1 until his wife suggested that he “better hurry up and start doing something constructive” with his life, at which time he began his writing career. Mr. Curtis attended the University of Michigan and won the Avery Hopwood Prize as well as the Jules Hopwood Prize for some of his writing there. Mr. Curtis’s major publications include *The Watsons go To Birmingham - 1963* (Newberry Honor and Coretta Scott King Honor) and *Bud, Not Buddy* (Newberry Medal, Coretta Scott King Award). Windsor, Ontario, Canada is his current home, where he lives with his wife Kaysandra and children Steven Darrell and Cydney McKenzie. His real-life grandfathers were Earl “Lefty” Lewis, a Negro Baseball League pitcher, and Herman E. Curtis, Sr., a 1930's bandleader of “Herman Curtis and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression.”

INTRODUCTION *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*

This unit has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, listening, and speaking skills through exercises and activities related to *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. It includes 20 lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** introduces students to the story. Following the introductory activity, students are given an explanation of 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. They are also introduced to the nonfiction assignment.

The **reading assignments** are approximately 30 pages each; some are a little shorter while others are a little longer. Students have approximately 15 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 6 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. 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 6 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 gives students dictionary definitions of the words and has them match the words to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have an 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 extra discussion questions, there is a vocabulary review lesson which pulls together all of the separate vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and gives students a review of all of the words they have studied.

Following the reading of the book, 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. These questions are done as a **group activity**.

Using the information they have acquired so far through individual work and class discussions, students get together to further examine the text and to brainstorm ideas relating to the themes of the novel.

The group activity is followed by a **reports and discussion** session in which the groups share their ideas about the book with the entire class; thus, the entire class gets exposed to many different ideas regarding the themes and events of the book.

There are **three writing assignments** in this unit, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or expressing personal opinions. The first assignment is to **persuade**. Students will take the role of Kenny and persuade Byron to improve his behavior. The second writing assignment is to **inform**. Students will create a notebook like Momma's to plan for a trip. The third writing assignment is to **express personal opinions**. Students will respond to a statement that Kenny says in the last chapter of the book.

In addition, there is a **nonfiction reading assignment**. Students are required to read a piece of nonfiction related in some way to *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. After reading their nonfiction pieces, students will fill out a worksheet on which they answer questions regarding facts, interpretation, criticism, and personal opinions. During one class period, students make oral presentations about the nonfiction pieces they have read. This not only exposes all students to a wealth of information; it also gives students the opportunity to practice public speaking.

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.

There are five different unit tests included. Two are multiple choice, two are short answer and there is also an advanced short answer unit test.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **resource materials sections** include 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.

UNIT PLAN ADAPTATIONS – *The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963*

Block Schedule

Depending on the length of your class periods, and the frequency with which the class meets, you may wish to choose one of the following options:

- Complete two of the daily lessons in one class period.
- Have students complete all reading and writing activities in class.
- Assign all reading to be completed out of class, and concentrate on the worksheets and discussions in class.
- Assign the projects from the daily lessons at the beginning of the unit, and allow time each day for students to work on them.
- Use some of the Unit and Vocabulary Resource activities during every class.

Gifted & Talented / Advanced Classes

- Emphasize the projects and the extra discussion questions.
- Have students complete all of the writing activities.
- Assign the reading to be completed out of class and focus on the discussions in class.
- Encourage students to develop their own questions.

ESL / ELD

- Assign a partner to help the student read the text aloud.
- Tape record the text and have the student listen and follow along in the text.
- Give the student the study guide worksheets to use as they read.
- Provide pictures and demonstrations to explain difficult vocabulary words and concepts.
- Conduct guided reading lessons, asking students to stop frequently and explain what they have read.
- Show the movie version of the novel and help students identify characters and events, and relate the action in their own words. You may want to show the movie without the sound and explain the actions in your own words.

UNIT OBJECTIVES – *The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963*

1. Through reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* students will analyze characters and their situations to better understand the themes of the novel.
2. Students will identify the details in the setting that help them understand the time period in which the novel is set as well as the author's purpose for writing the story.
3. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
4. Students will be able to identify and discuss the moods in the novel and explain when and why the mood changes.
5. Students will practice reading aloud and silently to improve their skills in each area.
6. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with it.
7. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963*.
8. Students will practice writing through a variety of writing assignments.
9. The writing assignments in this are geared to several purposes:
 - a. To check the students' reading comprehension
 - b. To make students think about the ideas presented by the novel
 - c. To make students put those ideas into perspective
 - d. To encourage critical and logical thinking
 - e. To provide the opportunity to practice good grammar and improve students' use of the English language.
10. 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
The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963

| Date Assigned | Reading Assignment | Completion Date |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| | Chapters 1-2 | |
| | Chapters 3-4 | |
| | Chapters 5-6 | |
| | Chapters 7-8 | |
| | Chapters 9-10 | |
| | Chapters 11-12 | |
| | Chapters 13-14 | |
| | Chapter 15 | |

WRITING ASSIGNMENT LOG
The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963

| Date Assigned | Writing Assignment | Completion Date |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| | Writing Assignment 1 | |
| | Writing Assignment 2 | |
| | Writing Assignment 3 | |
| | Non-fiction Assignment | |

UNIT OUTLINE *The Watsons Go to Birmingham–1963*

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| 1 Introduction Nonfiction Assignment | 2 PVR Chapters 1-2 Study ?? Chapters 1-2 | 3 PVR Chapters 3-4 Oral Reading Evaluation | 4 Study ?? Chapters 3-4 Minilesson: Character Traits | 5 PVR Study ?? Chapters 5-6 Writing Assignment #1 |
| 6 PVR Study ?? Chapters 7-8 | 7 Quiz Chapters 1-8 Writing Conference PVR Chapters 9-10 | 8 Study?? Chapters 9-10 Minilesson: Setting | 9 Writing Assignment #2 | 10 PVR Chapters 11-12 |
| 11 Study?? Chapters 11-12 PVR Chapters 13-14 | 12 Study?? Chapters 13-14 PVR Chapter 15 | 13 Study?? Chapter 15 Minilesson: Mood | 14 Extra Writing/Discussion Questions | 15 Quotations Graphic Organizers |
| 16 Writing Assignment #3 | 17 Vocabulary Review | 18 Unit Review | 19 Test | 20 Nonfiction Assignment |

Key: **P** = Preview Study Questions **V** =Vocabulary Work **R** = Read

LESSON ONE

Objectives

1. To introduce the *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* unit
2. To relate prior knowledge to the new material
3. To distribute books, study guides and other related materials
4. To become acquainted with the Nonfiction reading assignment

Activity #1

Show students some pictures of typical scenes of the United States around the year 1963. Include pictures that show the houses, automobiles, hairstyles, and roadways. Make sure to have a distribution of scenes from across the country, including Michigan and Alabama. If possible, show pictures that depict the racial discrimination of the times, including pictures of signs that say, “Whites Only,” “Coloreds Only,” and so forth. Explain that this book is about a black family and events that happened in their lives in the year 1963. It is written in first person from the point of view of Kenny, the middle child of three children. The story line includes some real and some fictitious events. Discuss with students why an author might want to write in this way. Ask students how they think they will benefit from reading the book.

Activity #2

Ask students to tell you what they know about the United States in 1963, and especially about Birmingham, Alabama. Do a group KWL with students (included in this Lit Plan.) Write any information the students know in the K column (What I Know). Ask students what they want to find out and write those questions in the W column (What I Want to Find Out.) Keep the KWL sheet and refer back to it as students read the book. After reading the book, work with the group to complete the L column (What I Learned.)

Activity #3

Distribute books, study guides, and reading assignments. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides Students should preview the study guide questions before each reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in that section. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the question 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.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*
Writing to Persuade

PROMPT

Throughout the first six chapters Kenny gives several examples of Byron's disobedience and misbehavior. So far, nothing that his parents have said has motivated Byron to change his behavior.

Take the point of view of someone outside of the immediate family, perhaps a friend or even a social worker or counselor. You are writing an email to Byron asking him to change his behavior and stop doing the mean and disobedient things he does.

PREWRITING

Skim the first six chapters of the book and make a list of the examples of Byron's misbehavior. (If your teacher approves, you may want to read ahead the next several chapters to find more examples of Byron's troublesome deeds.) Include details about what he did, who or what his target was, and how his behavior was different from what he had been told to do. Next to each example write how you think his behavior should change and why. Then rank the misdeeds in order of severity, in order from most to least disruptive.

Remember that a persuasion piece can and should include your reasons for your request. The reasons should be backed up with or examples from the story.

DRAFTING

Make an introductory statement in which you describe the problem. Next state your request.

Then use one paragraph for each of the reasons that you think Byron's behavior should change. Use the supporting statements for each reason.

Summarize your request and respectfully ask Byron to send you a reply email by a certain date, perhaps a week after receiving your email.

PEER EDITING

When you finish the rough draft of your persuasive piece, ask another student to read it. After reading your rough draft, the student should tell you what he/she liked best about your work, which parts were difficult to understand, and ways in which your work could be improved. Your reader should also be able to summarize your opinion about Byron's behavior and what you want him to do about it based on your text. Reread your text considering your critic's comments, and make the revisions you think are necessary.

PROOFREADING/EDITING

Do a final proofreading of your persuasive piece, double checking your grammar, spelling, organization, and the clarity of your ideas.

FINAL DRAFT

Follow your teacher's guidance for completing the final draft of your paper.