



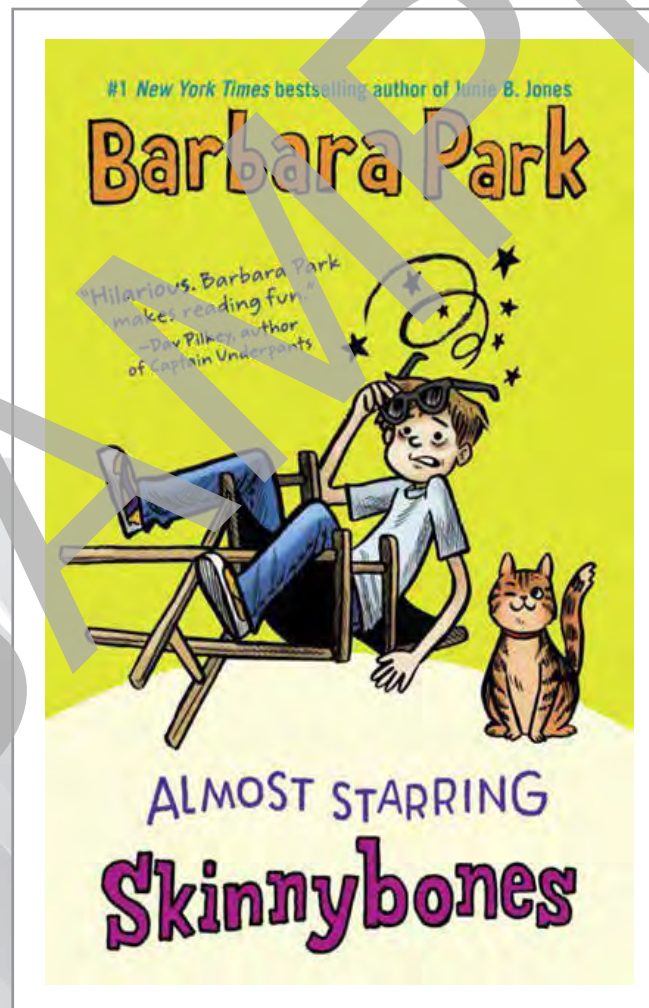
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Almost Starring Skinnybones

Barbara Park



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Almost Starring Skinnybones

Barbara Park

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Research, visualization

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/  
contrast

### Vocabulary

Analogies, synonyms, word  
mapping

### Literary Elements

Characterization

### Listening/Speaking

Drama, discussion,  
improvisation

### Writing

Descriptive, short story

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## Summary

After winning an essay contest, celebrity status is within the grasp of Alex “Skinnybones” Frankovitch. He appears on National Television in a cat food commercial. However, the commercial has Alex cast as a young boy preparing to run away from home with his cat and a barely movable large bag of cat food. This elicits no kudos from his classmates, but does make for plenty of laughs. As the celebrity status slips away, Alex manages to involve himself in different situations. Recognition is his at last, but is it the kind that he desires?

## About the Author

Barbara Tidswell Park was born April 21, 1947, in Mt. Holly, New Jersey. She married Richard Park in 1969, and they have two sons, Steven Allen and David Matthew. Park attended Rider College, 1965-67, and the University of Alabama, B.S. 1969. She is the author of books for young people.

Park has said about her writing, “The nicest thing about writing humor for children is that they are such an appreciative audience. You don’t have to be droll or dry or sardonic. Kids are eager to laugh, and, I think, they enjoy laughing at themselves the most. I have fun with my books by writing about characters who are ‘uncool’ and never quite in control. My readers can empathize and chuckle at the same time. For all their faults, the families in my books have a lot of fun as they muddle through life. I do like to think that I leave my readers with a sense that the moments of laughter and joy in life more than make up for the sadness.”

## Introductory Information and Activities

**Note:** Please be selective and use discretion when choosing the activities that you will do with this unit. It is not intended that everything be done, but that discretionary choices made are most appropriate for your use and group of students. A wide range has been provided so that individuals as well as groups may benefit from these selections.

### Initiating Activity

A few days before introducing the story itself, build up anticipation through the use of posters and banners, that will be put on display one or two at a time. Use a few “advertising” techniques that you may want to expand upon during the unit. The following are a few suggestions:

- A skeleton with the word SKINNYBONES attached to it.
- Banner: Coming Soon—In a book near you!
- Mobile: Alex Frankovitch with the following hanging attributes

witty          charming          humorous          fun          creative

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## Using Predictions in the Novel Unit Approach

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could be either an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

Use the facts and ideas the author gives.

Use your own prior knowledge.

Apply any new information (i.e., from class discussion) that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions:

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## Chapter 1—Pages 3-13

### Vocabulary

appearance 3  
keeled 6  
duffel bag 10

dramatic 5  
celebrity 6  
irritated 13

goals 5  
humiliating 7

essay 5  
persisted 9

### Vocabulary Activity

Put the vocabulary words into sets of two words each. Since there are ten vocabulary words, there will be five sets of two words. Use each set of words in a sentence. Choose one sentence to illustrate.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the reason that Alex gives for having people like Annabelle Posey around? (*Page 5, Alex feels that having people around like Annabelle Posey gives others a reason to keep trying to make something of themselves. "To set goals and stuff."*) Why do you think that Alex feels as he does? Do you think that you would feel the same way about Annabelle and others like her? Discuss. (See Post-reading Activity #1.)
2. Alex seems to feel that winning the essay contest gives him celebrity status and entitles him to special treatment. What are some of the things that he would like? (*Pages 9-13, Alex would like a small sports car, a small English butler, someone to carry his luggage, and to wear his sunglasses at all hours.*) Do you agree with Alex, that he has celebrity status, or with his parents who feel that he is still "plain old Alex Frankovitch"? Why? (See next question and Post-reading Activity #2.)
3. Alex has some thoughts as he tries to get to sleep at the hotel. "After a whole lifetime of being teased, was it really so awful to try to feel special for once? Didn't I deserve it?" (page 13) What is your opinion of Alex's reasoning? Discuss "deserving."

### Post-reading Activities

1. To Alex, Annabelle is a person who is annoying and bothersome. With words, create an image of a person that you think that you would find very annoying and bothersome. When finished, make an illustration of this person. How well-matched are the two kinds of "pictures"?
2. Alex makes known some of his wishes for special treatment. What about you? What would you like to have, should you achieve "celebrity status"?
3. On page 3, Alex describes the way that Uncle Happy looks when appearing on his television show. "He wears a cowboy hat, a red rubber nose, and a cape. It's the type of costume you dig up on Halloween when you're too old for trick or treat, but you still want the candy."

Put together a different outfit for Uncle Happy. What would you have him wear on his next show? What would you wear, should you be invited to appear with him? Describe the outfits, and then make illustrations or samples of the outfits.

4. Start an attribute web for each member of the Frankovitch family. Add to the webs as the story continues. (See page 10 of this guide.)