



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Barn

Avi



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Barn

Avi

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

Brainstorming, visualizing, research

Literary Elements

Characterization, story elements, dialogue, colloquial speech, similes, foreshadowing, climax

Writing

Narrative, description, persuasive, letter-writing, expository

Vocabulary

Comparison, categorizing, compound words, synonyms, antonyms

Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/contrast, sequencing, cause/effect, inference

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, drama, interviewing

Summary of *The Barn*

The setting is 1855 in the Oregon Territory. Gifted nine-year-old Benjamin convinces his older brother and sister to build a strong, substantial barn for their gravely ill father in hopes that he'll manage to recover. He doesn't recover, but the barn stands. Family relationships play out in a bittersweet tale.

About the Author

The author, whose full name is Avi Wortis, writes under the three-letter moniker Avi. Born in 1937, in New York City, he grew up in an artistic environment. Both parents, his great-grandparents, his grandmother, a twin sister, and an aunt were writers. Within the extended family were painters, a composer, and others active in music, theater, and film. Raised in Brooklyn, his family was active politically in various liberal causes. As a student, he suffered with dysgraphia, a marginal impairment in his writing abilities that caused him to reverse letters or misspell words.

An avid reader, Avi considers this love to have been his first step toward writing professionally. He attended Antioch University (where he studied playwriting as a prelude to his writing career), and earned a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 1964, he earned an M.S.L.S. from Columbia. He worked as a librarian in Performing Arts Research at the New York Public Library from 1962 to 1970 and was an assistant professor and humanities librarian at Trenton State College from 1970 to 1986.

Now writing full time, Avi interacts with children in talks at schools about his writing. Avi married Joan Gabriner, a weaver, in 1963, divorced, and later married Copelia Kahn, an English professor. He has two children and a stepson.

Other Books by Avi

The Man Who Was Poe
Punch with Judy
The Bird, the Frog, and the Light: A Fable
Blue Heron
Bright Shadow
Captain Grey
City of Light/City of Dark: A Comic Book Novel
Devil's Race
Emily Upham's Revenge: A Massachusetts Adventure
Encounter at Easton
The Fighting Ground (Novel Unit available)
The History of Helpless Harry: To Which Is Added a Variety of Amusing and Entertaining Adventures
Man from the Sky
Night Journeys
No More Magic

Nothing but the Truth (Novel Unit available)
A Place Called Ugly
Poppy (Novel Unit available)
Romeo and Juliet, Together (and Alive) at Last
S.O.R. Losers
Smuggler's Island
Something Upstairs
Sometimes I Think I Hear My Name
Tom, Babette & Simon
Three Tales of Transformation
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle
(Novel Unit available)
"Who Was that Masked Man, Anyway?"
Windcatcher
Wolf Rider: A Tale of Terror

Background Information

Oregon became a territory in 1848, and Oregon City was proclaimed the territorial capital in early 1849. The legislature was moved to Salem in 1851. Oregon's present boundaries were drawn in 1853, when Congress created the Washington Territory. Oregon was admitted to the Union on February 14, 1859.

The Donation Land Law of 1850 spurred territorial growth and development. This law provided that any male American citizen over 18 who settled in Oregon before December 1850 could receive 320 acres of land. His wife could also receive 320 acres of her own. To qualify for ownership, a man had to cultivate his claim for four years.

Settlers traveled west on the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to the Willamette Valley during the 1840's.

Initiating Activities

1. What do you know of the period 1855–1860 in the Oregon Territory? Do some investigation in the library and in your textbooks. Record your ideas on a K-W-L Chart (See page 6 of this guide).
2. Brainstorm ideas about family responsibilities. Fill an attribute web with your ideas.
3. Anticipation Guide—Respond to each of the statements on the Anticipation Guide, found on page 10. Save your page for use again after reading the book.
4. Set yourself up for the book by making some predictions. First look for clues (the cover, reading selected pages, checking out the reviews on the back cover, considering the author and other books of his that you've read), then make your predictions and support them.
5. React and respond to these themes: family responsibilities and giftedness.

Vocabulary

daubed 12

privy 14

mangled 16

Discussion Questions and Activities

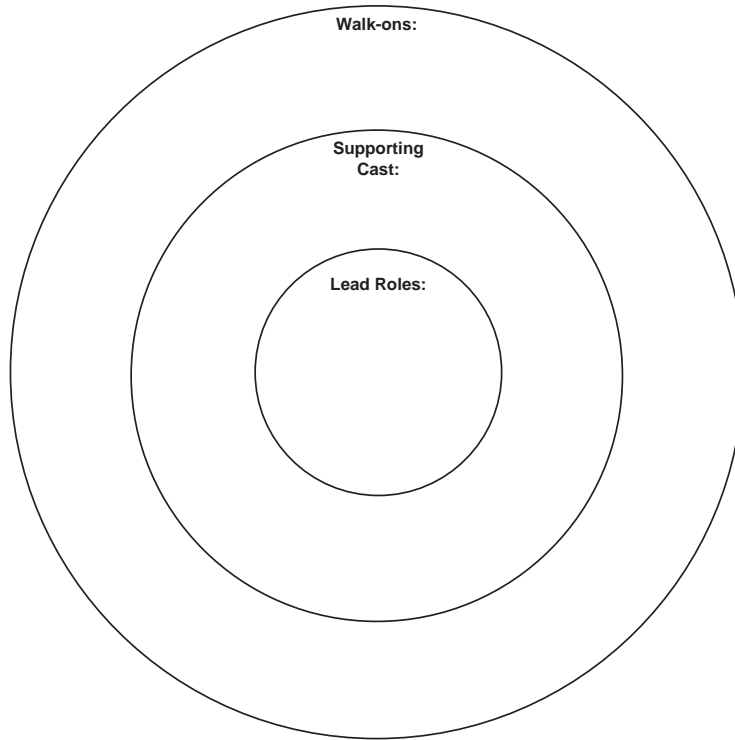
1. Describe Ben's homecoming. (*Pages 11-12, He notes how much Harrison has grown and receives the news that father is no better. The three siblings just stand, and then Ben goes into the one-room cabin to see his father.*)
2. What kind of a house does the family have? (*Pages 12-13, It is modest, built of ash tree logs, and is one room with a loft, dirt floor, and a smoky fireplace.*)
3. What is Father's condition? (*Pages 14-16, He is bedridden, can't speak, and the area smells like an open privy. It's a sad situation.*)
4. Explain these descriptions from the book: "an old corn husk doll without stuffing" and "eyes...as deep as a well that sank forever, only to fetch up dry." (*Pages 15-16, The doll image is of a once large, muscular person who has shrunk, and the eyes suggest a deepness, but with only limited understanding and comprehension at present.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Notice the comparisons in this chapter. List them. Why are comparisons helpful in descriptions? Why do authors use many comparisons in their writing? Choose an object to describe using comparisons.
2. Prepare an illustration of the house, exterior or interior.
3. Act out Father telling a joke. Either use one of the jokes in the book or another joke of your own.
4. How would the family situation in the book be handled in contemporary times? Answer in a short paragraph.

The Barn Has Been Optioned for the Movies!

1. You are the casting director. Who are the lead roles, supporting cast, and walk-ons? What kind of characters are they? What actors will fill the roles? How should they look? What acting abilities will they need?



2. Design costumes for the cast. Explain your choices.
3. Pick the music. Will you need background music only or will you have musical “numbers”?
4. Design the set.
5. Identify and describe the props.
6. What will you title your movie? Why?