



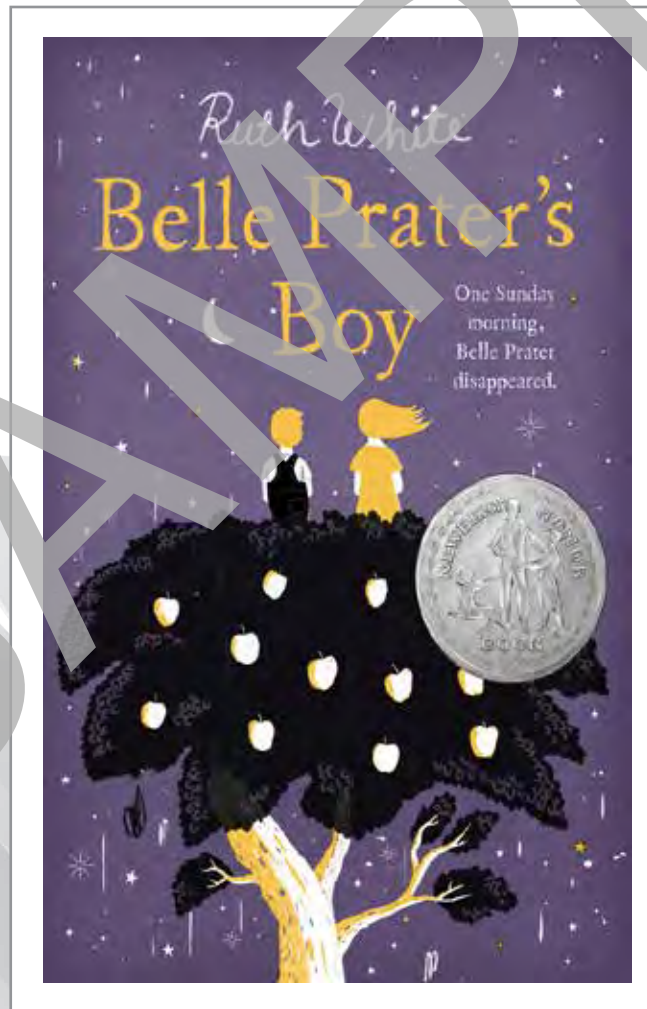
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Belle Prater's Boy

Ruth White



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Belle Prater's Boy

Ruth White

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!

ISBN 978-1-50203-609-4

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying and categorizing, comparing and contrasting

Writing

Comparison/contrast, reading response log, creative

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interviewing

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, cause/effect, inference

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot, flashback, conflict, mood, humor, simile/metaphor, dialogue, theme

Summary of *Belle Prater's Boy*

Belle Prater becomes a local legend in Coal Station, Virginia, when she disappears. Belle's boy—cross-eyed, gawky, homely Woodrow—comes to live with his grandparents. Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster, nicknamed Beauty, lives next door. Gypsy tells the story of the pain that Woodrow feels because his mother has abandoned him and of her own sorrow over her dead father. Gypsy comes to admire her cousin Woodrow for the way he uses his personality and intellect to adapt to life in town, fend off rude questions about his mother, and handle the school bully. Gypsy seems to have a perfect life, except for a recurring nightmare. Despite its treatment of serious themes such as child abandonment and suicide, much of the novel is filled with the stories Woodrow likes to spin and the jokes Gypsy loves to tell.

About the Author

Ruth White was born March 15, 1942, in Whitewood, Virginia, a poverty-stricken coal mining region. Her father died when she was six, and her family's struggles are reflected in her stories of Appalachia. After finishing high school in Virginia's coal region, she attended a small mountain college, Montreat-Anderson College. She became an English teacher and school librarian. She has written three other books: *The City Rose*, *Sweet Creek Holler*, and *Weeping Willow*.

Initiating Activities

Note: It is not intended that everything presented in this guide be done. Please be selective when choosing the activities you will do with the unit. The choices that are made should be appropriate for your use and your group of students. A wide range of activities has been provided so that individuals as well as groups may benefit.

The teacher will discuss the suicide of Gypsy's father using discretion. The author does a fine job of presenting the suicide and resulting depression. It is suggested that the teacher read some of the listed materials on the subject in order to professionally lead students through this excellent novel.

Choose several of the following activities to stimulate interest in the novel prior to reading.

1. Predictions

Have students look at the front cover of the book and make some guesses about the story. Ask: What might the relationship between these two characters be? How old do they appear to be? What about the setting? Where might this story take place? What could the title mean?

2. Summary

Read aloud the back-cover summary. After reading the summary, would you choose to read this book on your own? What is a mystery? Do you think this book could be classified as one? (At this point, you might want to provide the author's background from above.)

Chapter-by-Chapter Summaries, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Activities

Chapter 1

Pages 1–15

Summary

Belle Prater has mysteriously disappeared and her son, Woodrow, is living with his grandparents. Woodrow tells his cousin Gypsy that the answer to the mystery of his mother's disappearance lies in a poem she read over and over again.

Vocabulary

isolated 3

insinuations 5

theories 9

traipsing 4

saturation 6

aggravate 9

speculation 5

plagued 7

mystic 10

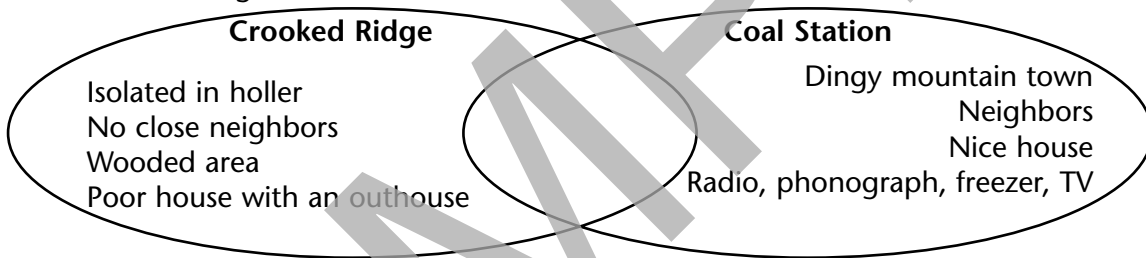
humdrum 5

rift 8

admonitions 12

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. What is the setting (time and place) in which the story opens, on pages 3–7? (*The story opens in Crooked Ridge in 1953. Woodrow moves to Coal Station, Virginia, to live with his grandparents.*) Compare where Woodrow lived in Crooked Ridge with life in Coal Station. Use the Venn diagram.



2. Who is the narrator of the story? (*Gypsy Leemaster, niece of Belle Prater and cousin of Woodrow*)
3. What is the problem at the beginning of the novel? (*Aunt Belle has mysteriously disappeared.*)
4. Why does Woodrow come to live with his grandparents? (*Page 6, Woodrow's father starts drinking too much, and the grandparents believe that Woodrow is not growing up in a "healthy environment."*) What do you think a "healthy environment" is?
5. What are your impressions of Woodrow? (*Pages 8–10, He is poorly dressed, has shaggy blond hair, is gawky and backward, self-conscious, and cross-eyed.*)
6. What do we know about Gypsy? (*She is an only child. Gypsy's father is dead—and there is some mystery or tragedy about it. Her mother is a teacher and Gypsy does not like her stepfather. Gypsy likes to tell jokes.*)
7. What is the one thing that Gypsy's mother tells her not to do with Woodrow? (*Pester him with questions about his mother*) Why does Gypsy do it anyway? Why is it surprising that Woodrow gives her an interesting answer? What do you think the poem means? What do you think happened to Belle Prater?

Chapter 5

Pages 39–45

Summary

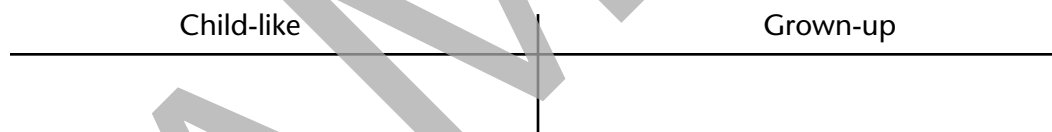
Gypsy's mother tells her the story of Aunt Belle's decision to run off and marry Everett Prater. Gypsy has a bad nightmare.

Vocabulary

mesmerized 40 immature 43 impulsive 43 reckless 43

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. How did Aunt Belle take it when Amos became Love's boyfriend? How did she act? How did Love and Amos treat her? Were they mean to her on purpose? (pages 40–41) How could they have treated her?
2. How did Belle act when she ran off with Everett Prater? (page 43, "immature, impulsive, reckless") Do you think she loved him? Why did Belle think she had to get away? What other choices did she have to get away from home?
3. Gypsy suggests that maybe Belle has once more left a familiar, safe place to jump into a new and different world. Why does Gypsy's mother doubt this? (pages 43–44, *She does not think Belle would have left Woodrow on purpose.*)
4. Gypsy has a terrible dream about a dead animal on page 44. Has she had this dream before? What does the dream mean? What does Gypsy's mother know about the dream?
5. How does Gypsy act like both a grown-up and a child? Develop a chart to note childlike and grown-up characteristics.



Chapter 6

Pages 46–57

Summary

Gypsy and Woodrow go to Sunday School, where Woodrow tells a wild story that amuses the students, disturbs the teacher, and shows that he is not a dummy and not very shy. Mrs. Cooper insults Woodrow with comments about his looks and his mother. Gypsy and Woodrow share secrets in the treehouse.

Vocabulary

ample 52 stash 53 conjured 53 swashbuckling 53
invisible 55 resolution 56

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Woodrow is not shy. How would you act on the first day of Sunday School if you did not know anyone? Woodrow tells a good joke. What does it take to tell really funny stories?

Characterization-Reaction Chart

Directions

By telling the reader what a character does, says, and thinks, and showing how he or she relates to other characters, a good writer can make fictional characters seem like real people. Sometimes, as we get to “know” the characters, our opinions of them change. As you read the novel, fill in the chart below. Under #1, jot down two examples of each character’s actions. Under #2, tell why you think he/she acted that way. Under #3, explain how you would have reacted to the character if you had been there yourself.

	1. Says/Does	2. Why?	3. My Reaction
Buzz			
Blind Benny			
Porter			
Woodrow			