



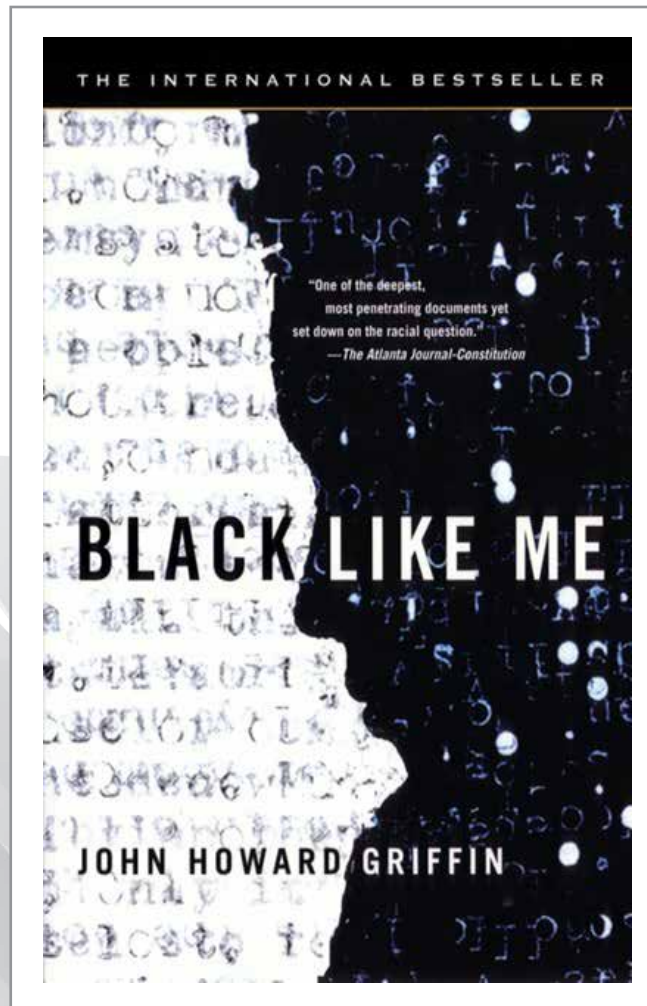
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Black Like Me

John Howard Griffin



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Black Like Me

John Howard Griffin

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

Prediction, analysis,
evaluation, research,
inference

Comprehension

Literary terms, application

Writing

Description, compare/
contrast, diary, journal,
letter, poetry, newspaper
article, application of
principles, book review

Listening/Speaking

Drama, personal experience,
discussion, presentations,
monologue

Fine Arts

Skit, art, collage, bulletin
board, bookmark

History/Geography

Research famous black
Americans

Genre: nonfiction diary

Setting: the Deep South, mostly Louisiana and Mississippi

Point of View: first-person participant

Themes: racism, prejudice, civil rights, survival, invisibility of the black man

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. society

Tone: melancholy, dark, candid

Date of First Publication: 1961

Summary

John Howard Griffin—artist, musician, and author—chemically changed the color of his skin to pass as a black man in the Deep South in 1959. Changing only his skin color, he kept his identity, wore his usual clothes, retained his educated speech patterns, and replied honestly when asked questions about himself or his family. For six weeks Griffin traveled through Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama to experience firsthand the verbal and physical brutality of whites toward men and women of color. In his book, Griffin describes many African-American stereotypes and recounts his experiences in journal form.

Note: *Black Like Me* sometimes refers to blacks as “Negroes.” This term is outdated and often offensive. However, it is used in the Novel Units® guides to maintain accuracy and consistency with the book.

About the Author

Personal: Born in Dallas, Texas, on June 16, 1920, John Howard Griffin was raised in Fort Worth. He was trained in classical music by his mother and studied music and literature in France at the age of 15. He also studied medicine and psychiatry, and he experimented with using music therapy for the criminally insane. At age 19, he worked as a medic in the French army and later served with the United States Army Air Corps in the South Seas during World War II. Griffin temporarily lost his vision due to war injuries but wrote five novels during his ten years of blindness.

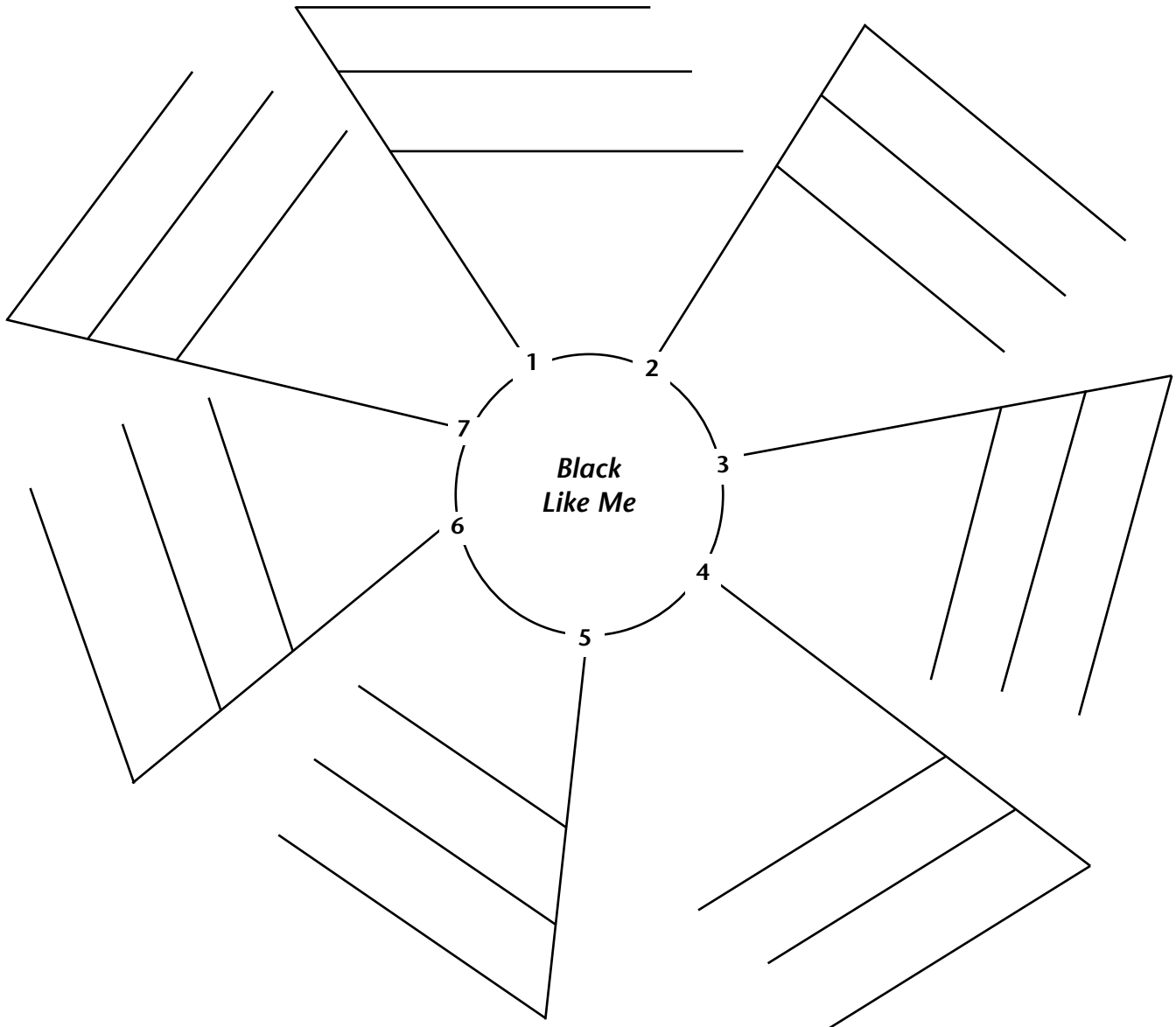
While living in France, Griffin converted to Catholicism and came to the realization that American prejudicial views of the black race were not accepted in Europe. His taste of Nazi philosophy also made him realize there were similarities between the Nazi attitude toward Jews and the Southern attitude toward African Americans.

Griffin married Elizabeth Holland in 1953, and the couple had four children. Griffin died in 1980.

Professional: John Howard Griffin wrote novels, short stories, articles, and journalistic pieces and was also an accomplished photographer. His most famous written work is *Black Like Me*. He received numerous awards during his writing career, including awards from the National Association of Negro Women, the Pope John Paul XXIII Pacem in Terris Award, and the Christian Culture Award.

Incident Map

Directions: On the map below, choose seven different incidents that occurred during Griffin's journey as a black man. On the long line, write the date and place. On the short lines, write the name of the person or persons he encountered, a word describing the situation, and the result of the situation.



November 14–November 16, pp. 45–83

As Griffin continues his experiment, he begins to understand Southern justice. When no indictments are returned in the Mack Parker kidnap-lynch murder case, even with strong FBI proof, Griffin experiences the hopelessness in the black community firsthand. He decides to go to Mississippi despite the warnings of Sterling and Joe. On his bus trip he meets Christophe, who scorns his own race, and Bill Williams, who advises Griffin before he enters Mississippi. Before and during the trip, Southern prejudice touches Griffin. After he gets his room and eats, melancholy overwhelms Griffin, and he decides to call a white friend to get him out of the Quarter in Hattiesburg. P. D. East, a newspaperman, rescues Griffin from the despondency of the Negro district. Eventually, Griffin decides to go to Biloxi.

Vocabulary

dossier (47)
 placated (54)
 abject (57)
 emanated (62)
 animosity (64)
 lasciviousness (64)
 ingenuity (67)
 innocuous (73)
 reprisal (74)
 flagrant (75)
 cynicism (75)
 juxtaposition (76)
 monologue (77)
 ostentatiously (79)
 incredulous (80)

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the story most effective in first-person narrative style? *(First person is more personal and more informal. The reader feels as though he is traveling with Griffin. A closeness between the writer and the reader occurs, allowing the reader to get inside the mind and heart of the writer. In first person, details are often clearer, and the commentary is more poignant.)*
2. What is surprising about Christophe and his actions on the bus? *(He is a paradox or an enigma. Although he is a handsome, well-dressed black man, he scorns the other blacks around him. While quoting Latin beautifully, he viciously turns on his black brothers. Although Christophe is well spoken, handsome, and educated, he has spent time in prison and is planning again to shoot people. Responding to Griffin as a religious man, he weeps and agrees that religion is the only peace, but then refuses to accept it. He is obviously a man not at peace with his black skin or others of his race. pp. 53–58)*
3. The bus driver refers to Bill as “boy.” Why is the reference offensive? *(It shows a lack of respect, intolerance, misplaced superiority, an intent to humiliate, meanness, and prejudice. p. 60)*
4. Analyze the metaphor Griffin uses when he says, “I knew I was in hell” (p. 66). *(The world he has entered is totally “estranged” from the world he came from. He feels the desolation, chaos, and despair that a black person feels on a daily basis. The sights, smells, and sounds of his surroundings create an existence that lacks “order and harmony”—a world away from his orderly white world.)*
5. Describe the results of P. D. East’s attempt to write about fairness for the Negro. *(P. D. East published a paper in Petal, Mississippi. He boldly spoke out against prejudice and injustice, with biting ads and humor. He paid dearly for siding with the black population. He was threatened and hounded by anonymous callers. Consequently, he lost most of his paid subscribers and businesses wouldn’t buy ads. In addition, he lost friends who no longer wanted to socialize with him and felt that he was in physical danger. He experienced economic ruin, but Griffin explains that he wrote “at his highest” during these troubled times. pp. 74–76)*
6. Why does Griffin feel that most whites cannot honestly consider themselves superior to black people? *(Answers will vary. Many exhibit qualities that are despicable: hate, lack of compassion, prejudice, cruelty, hypocrisy, injustice, etc. To be superior, one must act in a superior way; the white people Griffin is in contact with think and act at the lowest level of compassion toward their fellow human beings while justifying their behavior to themselves.)*
7. **Prediction:** What will Griffin encounter as he hitchhikes at night?

Supplementary Activities

1. Characterization: Complete the Character Web on page 9 of this guide for one of the individuals Griffin interacts with in this section.
2. Literary Elements: Find and write the similes on pages 46, 61, 69, and 76. Find and write the metaphors on pages 47 and 68. Find and write the allusions on pages 53, 64, and 76.
3. Imagery: This section contains superb imagery. Draw five columns and label them sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Under each column, list words or activities that develop the use of imagery in Griffin's writing on pages 66–69.
4. Research: Research the Ku Klux Klan and answer the questions who, when, where, and why. What were some of their activities, and what were the results?
5. Research: Divide the class into groups and research Mississippi (state flower, song, weather, tourist spots, rivers, famous people, etc.). Each group should present its findings to the class.
6. Roundtable Discussion: Discuss why blacks call some people "Uncle Tom." Explain the origin of the term and give an overview of what the fictional character Uncle Tom was really like. Discuss how this name could be offensive to black people.
7. Literary Analysis: Begin the Story Map on page 10 of this guide. Continue this activity as you read the book.
8. Character Analysis: Complete the Survival Chart on page 11 of this guide.
9. Creative Writing: Choose a picture of your area of the country. Describe the picture in one paragraph, using as much imagery as possible.

November 19–November 25, pp. 83–121

Warning: In this section there is frank discussion of black and white sexuality, which may not be suitable for all readers.

Vocabulary

anonymity (86)
 impugn (87)
 tacitly (87)
 spurious (88)
 obtuse (89)
 impetus (93)
 guileless (94)
 salacious (103)
 mongrelization (103)
 surmise (105)
 imperceptible (113)
 defrauded (114)
 anthropological (115)
 epithets (115)
 disconsolate (117)

Griffin discovers how uninhibited and racist whites can be when he hitchhikes at night. Under the cover of darkness, the drivers reveal much of their personal sexual life and immoral thoughts. He is shocked at how open they are at night with a black stranger. He tries to dispel white stereotypical concepts of black men and women. Soon after, he runs into a black preacher who invites him home. Griffin talks to the man about God and the Bible. As Griffin continues his travels, he is picked up by a black mill worker who invites him to spend the night with his family—his wife and six children. The family is extremely poor but gives Griffin, who is lonely and depressed, a new outlook on life. He ends up in Montgomery, Alabama, where there is a fresh atmosphere of passive resistance to Southern racism.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the people who pick up Griffin while he is hitchhiking act differently than they would in other company? (*First, white men more often pick him up after dark, which shows that once night covers them, they feel more comfortable associating with black people. The men let down verbal and moral bars, and they are unrestrained*