



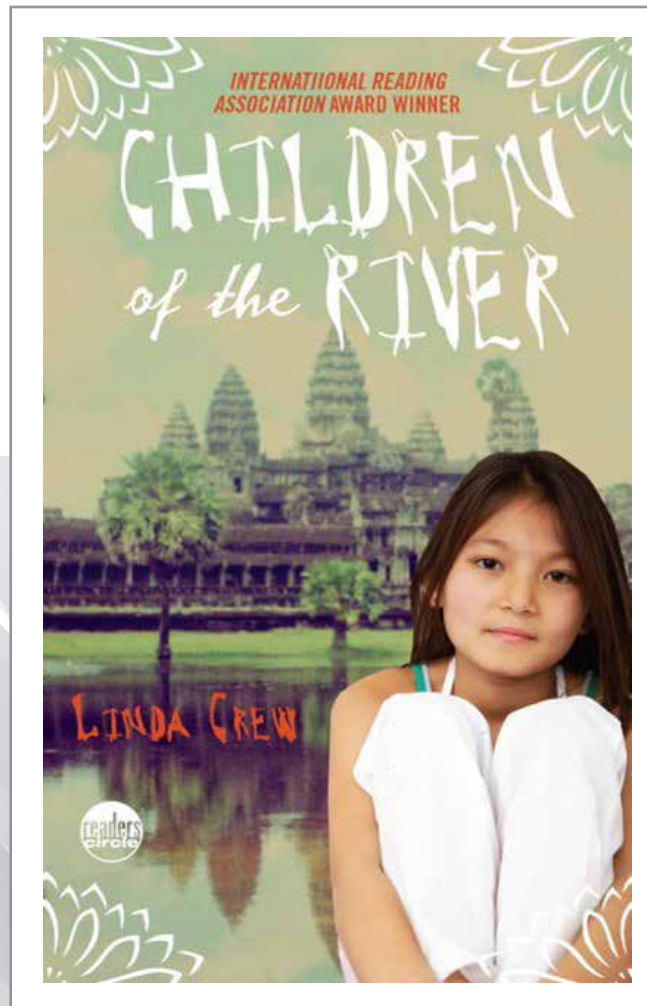
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Children of the River

Linda Crew



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

# Children of the River

Linda Crew

## 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

Multiple points of view,  
brainstorming

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/  
contrast

### Writing

Journal, short answers

### Vocabulary

Antonyms/synonyms,  
analogies

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion

### Literary Elements

Dialects, symbolism,  
foreshadowing

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## Summary of *Children of the River*

*Children of the River* by Linda Crew is written from the viewpoint of Sundara, a Cambodian refugee, who fled the Khmer Rouge army when she was thirteen. Settling in Oregon with her aunt's family, she struggles to balance life in high school and a traditional Cambodian home life. It is particularly difficult in the area of boy-girl relationships. Detailed plot summaries are included in this guide, chapter-by-chapter.

### About the Author

Linda Crew was born in 1951 and now lives with her husband Herb and their three children on a farm in her hometown in Oregon. She attended Lewis and Clark College and graduated from the University of Oregon, Phi Beta Kappa, in 1973. Unlike many writers, she didn't always aspire to the career, having considered being an artist or folk singer or actress. Her idea for *Children of the River* originated when a family of Cambodian refugees came to work on her farm during the harvest time.

Other books by Crew include *Someday I'll Laugh About This*, *Nekemah Creek*, and *Ordinary Miracles* (a novel for adults).

### Introductory Activities and Information

**Note:**

**It is not intended that everything presented in this guide be done in every classroom with every class. Please be selective, and use discretion 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.**

**Initiating Activities:**

1. Show the film *An Immigrant Experience* (from *New World Video*). Then follow with these questions:
  - a) What expectations do you think Yanek and his family had when they came to America?
  - b) Describe the sort of people Yanek and his family were.
  - c) Discuss how Yanek reacted to America and American ways in comparison to his father and grandmother.

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- d) What was meant by the term “greenhorn”? Why didn’t Yanek want to be a “greenhorn”?
  - e) What hardships did Yanek and his family face? Don’t forget the sister!
  - f) Yanek’s father had a terrible accident at work. How would the consequences of an accident like that be different for the father and his son today?
  - g) How is Yanek’s experience similar and different from that of immigrants today?
  - h) Do you think the “American Dream” came true for Yanek and his family? Do you think the “American Dream” comes true for most immigrants today?
2. Complete the following activity sheets.

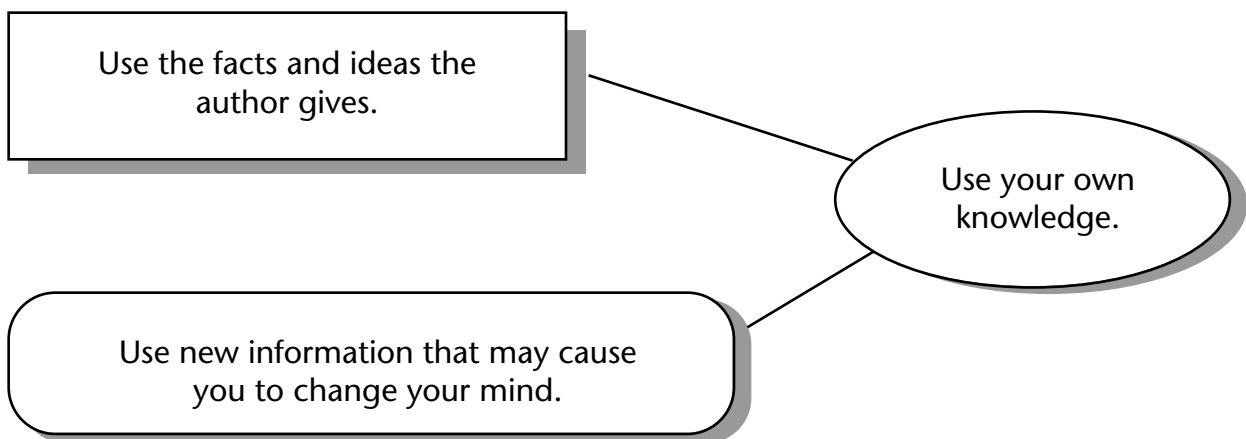


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## Using Predictions in the Novel Unit Approach

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how the conflict will be resolved, which details given by the author will be important to the plot, which details will help to fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses. As students work on 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 us to help us in making our predictions? Why are some predictions more likely than others?

A predicting chart is for students to record their predictions. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, you can review and correct previous predictions. This procedure serves to focus on predictions and to review the stories.



Predictions:
_____
_____
_____
_____

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to a local dump to throw away some garbage. At the dump, Sundara notices a doll in the garbage and the memories of Soka's baby's death on the ship from Cambodia flood back to her and she becomes hysterical. Moni returns Sundara home where Moni, Soka and Grandmother try to comfort her.

**Vocabulary:**

rebuked 172      retorts 173      tentatively 175      aura 179  
parasol 179      torrent 179      solicitude 181

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What causes Soka to tell Sundara, "...I am weary of feeding and sheltering a girl who makes me lose face with people..."? (Page 172, Soka says this to Sundara after she learns from Pok Sary's wife that Sundara has continued to see Jonathan at school after her promise not to do so.)
2. How does Grandmother explain Sundara's inability to stop crying after seeing the doll at the dump? (Page 178, Grandmother explains that it is not within Sundara's power to stop crying because "The spirit of Soka's baby has taken over Sundara's body." Grandmother rubs Sundara's back and asks the spirit of the little baby to leave Sundara. Grandmother stays with Sundara until the spirit flies away.)
3. At the end of the chapter, Sundara tells Grandmother that she remembers nothing from earlier in the day. Do you believe this is true? Why would Sundara say such a thing? (Answers will vary. Page 181, Most will likely understand that Sundara is not telling the truth; she does indeed remember what happened earlier. She is choosing to hide her emotion in this family where honest feelings are seldom discussed.)

## Chapter 18: Pages 182-193

**Chapter Summary:**

The family is surprised when Naro tells them that Dr. McKinnon has phoned to ask if Sundara will tutor him in the Khmer language since he will be traveling to the refugee camps to treat people there. At first Soka is hesitant to agree, but Naro persuades her that his request honors Sundara. Sundara begins spending time at the McKinnons', teaching her language to the doctor. Sundara joins Soka to visit a new Khmer family where they meet up with the wife of Pok Sary. Pok Sary's wife is offended by the presence of Soka since she considers herself superior and more equipped to handle the new arrivals. Soka stands up to Pok Sary's wife and tells her that their social standing in the "old Kampuchea" has no meaning in America.

The family prepares a Thanksgiving dinner when news arrives that Valinn, Soka's sister, will be coming from a refugee camp. Soka's attitude changes greatly. She and Sundara even have a talk in which they discuss why Sundara's parents sent her to be with Soka and the death of the

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baby. Soka helps Sundara see that she is not to blame for the baby's death and that her parents had sent her to Soka not to help with the baby, but to get her out of Phnom Penh before the Communists came. Sundara finally realizes she is not to blame and her parents acted out of the deepest love in sending her away.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why does Soka agree to let Sundara tutor Dr. McKinnon? *(Page 183, Naro helps Soka see that Dr. McKinnon is sincere in his need to learn the Khmer language and ways before he journeys to the refugee camps. But, Soka makes Sundara promise that every moment will be used to tutor the doctor. She finally admits that she is impressed by the doctor going to help the Khmer people. She says upper-class Khmer people "wouldn't dream of lowering themselves like that." Of course, Soka makes it seem like she was right all along about Dr. McKinnon's good character.)*
2. Soka has undergone some dramatic changes in the last several chapters. Explain why the scene involving her and the wife of Pok Sary is symbolic of the "new" Soka. *(Answers will vary. Pages 186-187, Soka finally stands up to Pok Sary's wife. She, like Sundara, becomes more assertive. Soka begins to abandon the rigid class system she knew so well in Cambodia in favor of a social rank based more on acceptance and understanding. She is becoming more confident of herself and her new country.)*
3. Sundara and Soka finally have a much needed heart-to-heart talk. The talk is possible in large part because of the changes that have occurred in both women. Summarize the conversation and predict how their relationship will be different in the future. *(Answers will vary.)*

## Chapter 19: Pages 194-198

**Chapter Summary:**

Dr. McKinnon prepares to leave for the refugee camps. Sundara gives him a plaque with the words she read in the hospital written in Khmer. Jonathan's feelings about his father as he readies himself for the journey have changed somewhat. Jonathan finally kisses Sundara.

**Discussion Question:**

How have Jonathan's feelings about his father changed now that Dr. McKinnon is ready to leave for Southeast Asia? *(Page 197, He feels like a jerk for doubting his father's commitment in the first place. Now that his departure is real, Jonathan is worried about his safety. Jonathan's own idealism is called into question as he faces the reality of his father traveling to a war-torn, disease-ridden land. Jonathan finally realizes how special his father really is.)*