



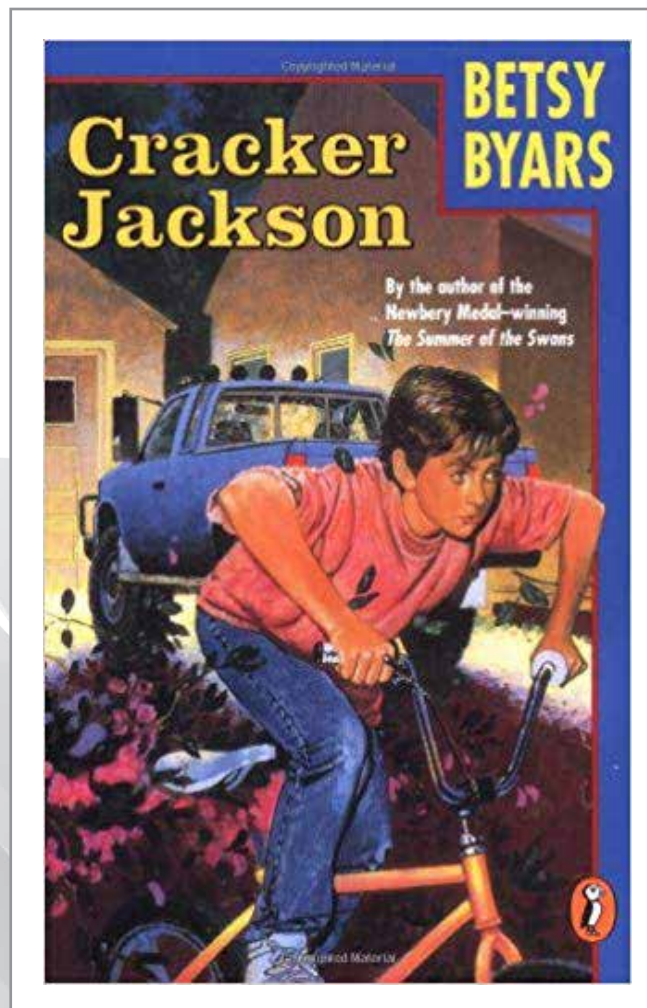
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Cracker Jackson

Betsy Byars



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Cracker Jackson

Betsy Byars

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 978-1-50203-705-3

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your
local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Instructions Prior to Reading	4
Teacher Information	4
Initiating Activities.....	4
Recommended Procedure	6
Graphic Organizers.....	6
Twenty-Four Chapters	15
Chapters contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions and Activities, Predictions, Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Extension Questions	29
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	29
Assessment.....	32

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot,
development, story map,
figurative language, conflict

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms,
multiple meaning words,
words in context

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, inference

Writing

Descriptive, narrative,
cartoons, chapter titles,
letters, journal

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussions,
dramatic monologue,
Reader's Theatre, drama

Summary

Eleven-year-old Jackson Hunter receives an “anonymous” letter with the message: “Keep away, Cracker, or he’ll hurt you.” He knows it’s from Alma, his ex-baby-sitter. Cracker thinks that Alma is being beaten by her husband, Billy Ray. In order to help her, Cracker involves his friend, Goat. Alma gives the boys excuses for her black eyes and bruises, but when Billy Ray hits their baby, Nicole, Alma knows she needs help. Jackson and Goat “borrow” his mother’s car to take Alma to a shelter. Halfway there she changes her mind and decides not to go. Eventually, Jackson tells his mother about Alma’s situation. Mrs. Hunter decides to talk to her, but before she can, Billy Ray beats Alma and Nicole. Mrs. Hunter finds them and takes them to the hospital. Billy Ray is arrested and Alma finally gets the help she needs.

About the Author

Betsy Byars was born in Charlotte, NC, in 1928. She describes her childhood as a happy one, with her family spending some of the time in Charlotte and the rest in the country. Her parents read to her a lot when she was a child, but she did very little writing then and never had a teacher tell her she ought to become a writer. When she entered college (Furman University, then Queens College) she intended to major in math, but switched to English. After graduation, she married a professor of engineering and had four children.

She began writing children’s books in the 1960’s, frequently getting ideas for her stories from experiences she had in her own life—often with her own children—or incidents she read about in the newspaper. Her Newbery Award winner, *The Summer of the Swans*, for instance, grew out of her experience of volunteering as a tutor for mentally retarded children. She describes finding inspiration for her writing as a slow process, and explains that it often takes about two years for her to complete a book. She works on the story for about a year, then spends another year revising it.

Byars has won countless awards for her writings, and several of her stories have been adapted to *ABC TV After School Special* episodes. In most of her stories, Byars uses a characteristic blend of humor and sensitivity in her portrayal of young people. Of her writing, she once told *The School Librarian* (March 1986, pages 6-13): “Every time I sit down to write a book, I feel like a character in that old fairy tale who, in order to survive, must turn straw into gold...What I know about spinning straw is nil and I have learned from hard reality that no little man in a funny suit is going to pop out of the woodwork to strike a deal...I’m a very practical writer. With every book, I come to halts; some are so severe that I literally have no idea how this story is going to end. I have learned to live with these faults, and if I just go on with my life as if nothing is wrong, sometimes my brain will throw me a bone.”

Instructions Prior to Reading

Please be selective, and use discretion when choosing the activities that you will do with the 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. You may wish to choose one or more of the following Prereading Discussion Questions. Each is designed to help students draw from their store of background knowledge about the events and themes they will meet in the story they are about to read.

Teacher Information

Wife-child abuse is coming more to the forefront of our attention. As with other emotionally-charged themes, this one should attempt to avoid sensationalism and lurid detail.

In developing a story for children about wife abuse, Byars has made some interesting creative choices. The idea of a children's book on this subject may seem odd since wife abuse involves an adult as the principal victim. However, Nicole, the baby, is also abused. Byars incorporates Alma's victimization into the experiences of Jackson Hunter. Alma is a beloved person to Jackson; he has good memories of her as his childhood baby-sitter, so anything that might hurt her is of concern to him. Alma's problem therefore becomes Jackson's problem. Making Alma the victim allows Byars to keep the emotional impact in control. What if it were Jackson's mother who was abused? If that were the case, the problems of shaping a story that was credible, yet not overpowering, would be much more difficult. Since Alma is outside of Jackson's family, both he and the reader are able to view the problem much more rationally.

Violence in this story is never viewed directly. The reader only sees the after-effects of violence, Alma's bruises and Alma's fear. The indirect view of the story's violence is simply true to Jackson's circumstances. He doesn't live that close to Alma, and he would have no occasion to see her abused. Cracker does not see the violence but he is disturbed and threatened by the implied violence.

In *Cracker Jackson*, Betsy Byars has successfully depicted a problem that children hear about and perhaps even see—all in terms that they can understand and perhaps learn from.

Initiating Activities

1. Discussion Questions on Friendship: What qualities do you look for in a friend? Do friends have to be just in your age group or can they be older? In what ways can or should you try to help a friend? How is it impossible to help a friend sometimes?
2. Prediction: Have students examine the cover illustration and chapter titles. Ask students to predict what the story will be about. What or who could be called "Cracker Jackson"? What can you tell about the boy on the cover? Begin Prediction Chart on page 4.

Using Character Webs in the Novel Unit Approach

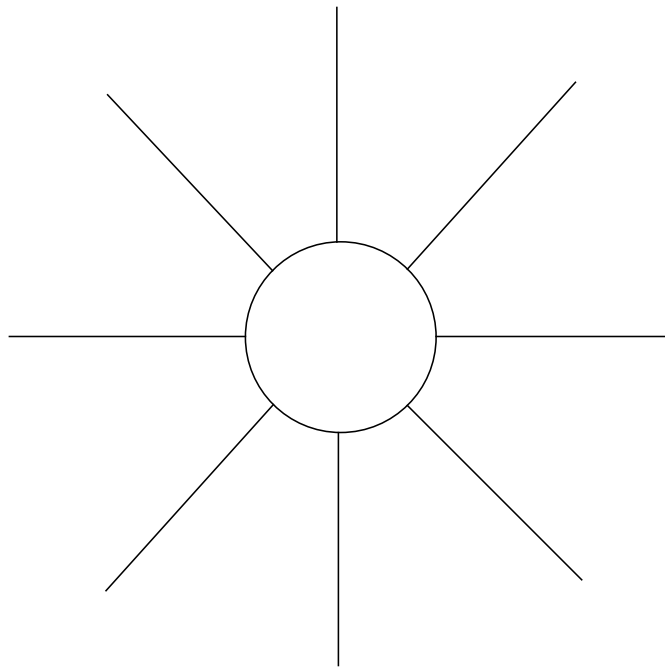
Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character, or completed gradually as information unfolds. They may be completed individually or as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character act? How do you think the character feels? How would you feel if this happened to you?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him/her to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the characters described in student attribute webs, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. Inferential thinking can be included in the discussion.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.



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

Chapter 1: "Anonymous Letters"—Pages 3-8

Chapter 2: "Bbbrrruucckkkk"—Pages 9-15

Vocabulary

anonymous 4
suture 7
python 13

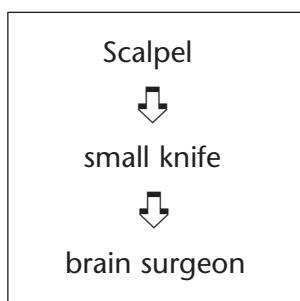
engrossed 6
feat 10

laboriously 6
ritual 10

scalpel 7
prey 10

Vocabulary Activity

Have students make up individual vocabulary cards that connect the target word and its definition with something or someone from the student's personal experience or observation. For example, if "scalpel" is used, the student's card might look like this:



Discussion Questions and Activities

1. A story map is an outline that helps you to understand and remember the story better. What do you know about the story after reading only the first chapter?
 - What is the setting?
 - Who is the main character or characters?
 - What is the problem?

Begin the story map on page 10 of this guide. As the story is read, more characters may be added and the setting and the problem may change, so additions to the story map may be made.

2. Literary Analysis: Suspense is tension that mounts as the reader reads on, anxious to find out what will happen (or when something will happen). Authors often heighten suspense by raising particular questions in the reader's mind. What does the author do to create suspense in the first chapter? (*Page 4, Cracker received an anonymous letter.*)

-
3. How did Cracker answer or handle his first anonymous letter? (*Page 6, He figured out the six people in his classroom who might have written him a note. Then he wrote six notes to them saying, "So do you."*) How would you have handled this? Only one of the six wrote the nasty note. What do you think the five innocent kids thought about Cracker's note?
 4. Why did Cracker call Billy Ray's garage when he did not want to talk to Billy Ray? (*Page 10, He hoped his friend Alma, Billy Ray's wife, would answer.*)
 5. If you were Goat's mother, what punishment would you have given him for the trick at the movie theater? (*pages 11-12*) How serious was this prank? What could have happened? What do you think happened to Peter Frampton, the principal's son who was not at the movie? Do you think Percy was caught? Is any of this detail important? If so, why? (*It begins to develop the character of Goat.*)
 6. What is a promise? How many promises have you made? Are there different kinds of promises? What kind of promise did Cracker make? (*Pages 14-15, He promised he would be home before dark.*) Is it all right to break these kinds of promises? Why or why not?
 7. Literary Analysis: Conflict is the struggle between two or more forces. There is external conflict where a character struggles against an outside force such as nature, society, or another person, and internal conflict where the struggle takes place within a character's own mind.

What types of conflict are there in this novel? Record all the instances of conflict as you meet them in your reading. (See page 14 of this guide.)

Prediction

What is Cracker planning to do? Do you think his mother would approve?

Supplementary Activities

1. Begin an attribute web for Cracker. (See pages 11-12 of this guide.)
2. Begin the Feelings Chart for Cracker on page 13 of this guide. Add to this chart after each chapter.
3. Drama: Divide the class into groups of two. One will assume the role of Goat's mother and the other will be Goat on the occasion of the theatre's manager's call about the trouble at the movie.