



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Crazy Lady!

Jane Leslie Conly



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Crazy Lady!

Jane Leslie Conly

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

Visualization, research

Comprehension

Predicting,
comparison/contrast

Literary Elements

Story elements,
characterization

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, pantomime

Writing

Poetry, letters,
description

Vocabulary

Compound words, words in
context

Summary

Vernon Dibbs has just begun junior high school, and things are not going too well for him. He has just realized that he is not talented enough to play major league baseball, his grades are not good, and his group of friends seems to be headed for trouble. Vern's family is still trying to cope with his mother's sudden death a year earlier. When he helps Maxine, the neighborhood "crazy lady," Vern discovers a network of support in his Tenley Heights community. Maxine's neighbor, Miss Annie, tutors him in English; as payment for the tutoring, she asks that Vernon help Maxine with a few chores, including companionship for her son, Ronald. As Vern comes to understand their problems (Ronald has special needs and Maxine is an alcoholic) and help them where he can, he challenges himself and finds talents he did not know he possessed. The Dibbs family and the entire inner-city neighborhood develop a sense of community as they work together to help Maxine, Ronald, and each other.

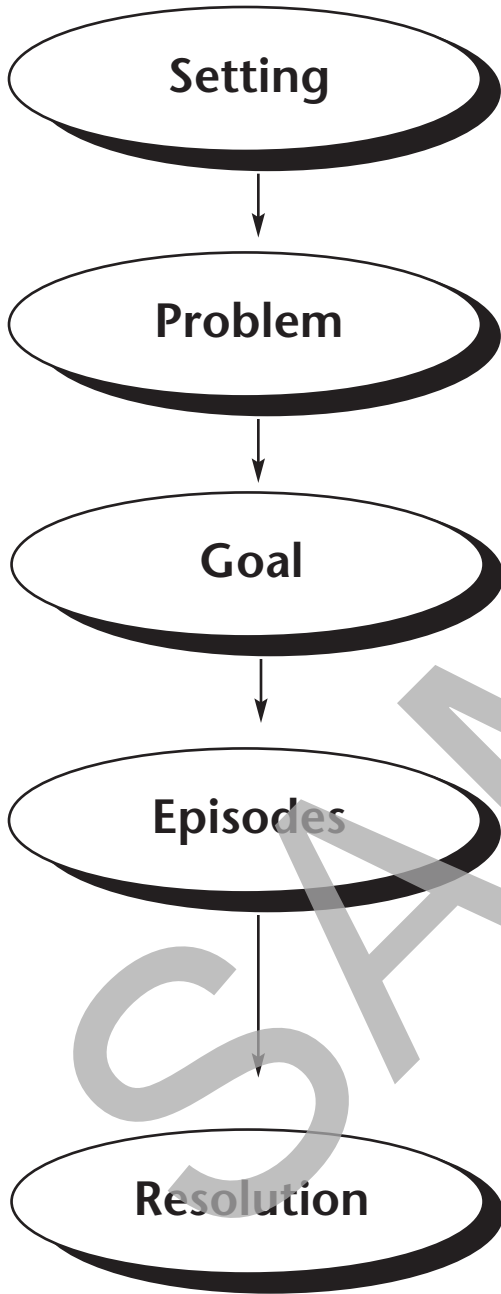
(Some suggested topics of study: Special Olympics, alcoholism, the city of Baltimore, inner-city neighborhoods, American League Baseball, the 1981 Baltimore Orioles baseball team, gardening)

About the Author

Jane Leslie Conly was born in 1948, in Virginia. She received a degree from Smith College in 1971 and graduated from the Writing Seminars Program at Johns Hopkins University in 1974. Both of her parents were writers and editors, so writing came naturally to her—she began writing stories in the first grade. Conly's father taught her to give her writing the cadence of spoken conversation and encouraged her to eliminate unnecessary description. Her mother taught her that good characterization is the most important element in fiction. Conly has worked as director of a community center and a camp, and as a mortgage counselor. Since the birth of her son in 1985, she has devoted her free time to writing.

Conly began writing children's books based on characters and situations developed by her father's work, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. *Crazy Lady!*, a realistic story, is a departure from this earlier work. This novel won a Newbery Honor Book Citation in 1993, an award also won by Conly's father's work.

Story Map



Characters _____

Time and Place _____

Problem _____

Goal _____

Beginning → Development → Outcome

Resolution _____

Chapter 31: Pages 171-173

Chapter 32: Pages 174-180

Chapter Summary

Miss Annie tries to explain to Vernon that the farm in North Carolina will be a better place for Ronald than Tenley Heights is. The aunt and uncle arrive to pick up Ronald. Most of the neighborhood gathers to give Ronald a send-off. Many people have gifts and mementos for him. Vernon runs alongside the car as it drives off. As its speed increases, Vernon runs harder and harder to keep up. Finally, as the car rounds a corner, he trips over the curb and falls. Vernon's father comes to check and comfort him.

Vocabulary

notary 171 pasteboard 177 lope 179

Vocabulary Activity

Do the Vocabulary Review—Synonym or Antonym? that is provided in the Supplementary Activities section of this guide.

Discussion Questions

1. Miss Annie and Vernon disagree on what they feel would be best for Ronald. What are their viewpoints? (*Page 172, Miss Annie feels that Ronald would be better off living in North Carolina with his aunt and uncle. "He needs food and sunshine and loving care."* *Page 172, Vernon feels that Ronald would be better off in the neighborhood, where he is known and liked, and where people are willing to look out for him. "This is his home!"*) Do you agree with Vernon or with Miss Annie? Why? Discuss.
2. What happens when Ronald gets to his uncle's car? (*Page 178, Ronald does not want to get into the car. Ronald looks around for someone he can trust, and his eyes meet Vernon's.*) Does Vernon help get Ronald into the car? (*Page 178, Vernon relates, "There was no way I was going to put him in that car."*) Why do you think Vernon feels as he does about putting Ronald into the car?
3. What does Vernon do as the car drives away? (*Pages 178-180, Vernon walks, and then runs, alongside the car.*) Why do you think Vernon runs alongside the car? (*Page 179, "Maybe they thought I was trying to stop them, and maybe I was."* *Vernon doesn't really seem to understand why he did this.*) Discuss.
4. How has helping Ronald changed the neighborhood, Vernon, and Vernon's family? Discuss as a class.

Post-reading Activities

1. Choose one idea to develop as a sequel.
 - a. Will Vernon remain in contact with Ronald? Will they ever see one another again? Write a short sequel to this part of the story. Tell what happens to their friendship.
 - b. What will happen to the members of the Dibbs family? Will they learn to help one another grow and develop their individual potentials? Write a story about the Dibbs family.
 - c. What will happen when Ronald reaches North Carolina? Will he grow and develop more in these new surroundings? Write a story about Ronald's life in North Carolina.
 - d. What will happen to Maxine? Will she be able to control her behavior when she is no longer responsible for Ronald? Write a story about Maxine after Ronald leaves the neighborhood.
 - e. Will Miss Annie continue to help Vernon? Will they build upon the friendship they have established? What will happen next in their lives? Write a story about Miss Annie and Vernon.
2. Complete the character attribute webs.
3. The picture on the cover of the book shows Maxine, Vernon, and Ronald. Compare the picture to the attributes on the webs of these characters. Discuss students' comparisons.
4. Complete the story map.
5. What gift or memento would you have placed in Ronald's cardboard box? Why?

Conclusion

Discuss one of the following sayings with the group, or choose a poem from the the book *Home* by Michael Rosen, 1992, or something of your own, to discuss with the group.

- The smallest good deed is better than the grandest intention.
- The love you liberate in your work is the love you keep.
- To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart.
- He who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.
- Except in occasional emergencies, there is not much that one man can do for another, other than to help him to help himself.
- Friendship is to be purchased only by friendship.