



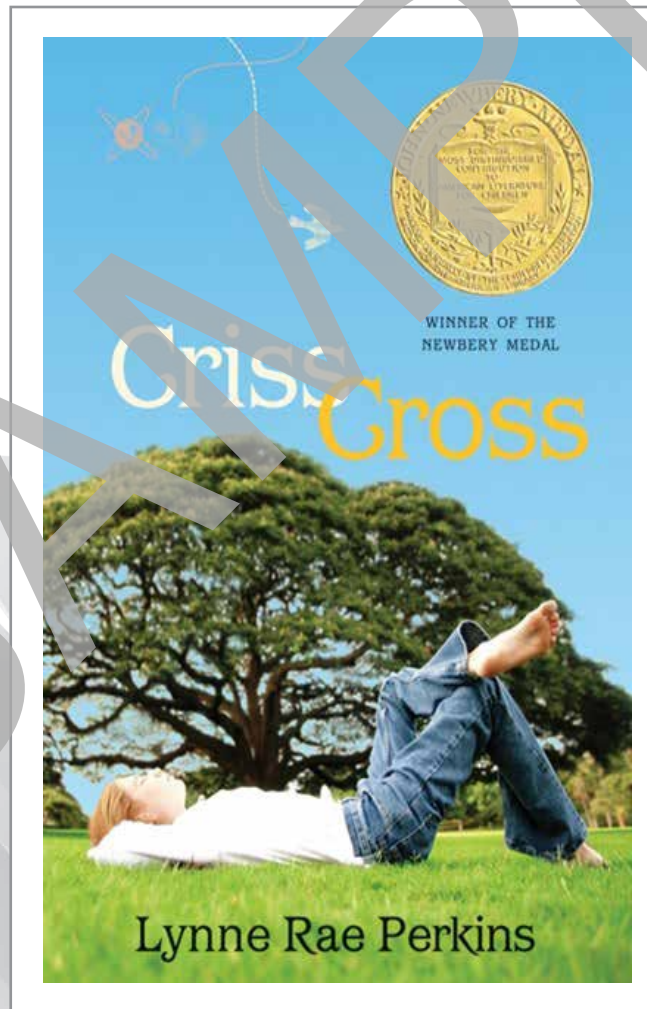
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Criss Cross

Lynne Rae Perkins



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Genre: fiction

Setting: small town of Seldem; circa 1970

Point of View: third-person omniscient and switching voice

Themes: friendship, recognition of self, social status, like vs. love, coming of age, confidence, individuality, missed opportunities

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. person

Style: narrative; variety of writing styles (i.e., haiku, song lyrics, question-and-answer format, split-screen scenarios)

Tone: conversational, informative, thought-provoking, humorous

Summary

Criss Cross is the story of a group of 14-year-olds growing up in a small town. Debbie wishes something good would happen to her, and when it does, she discovers more about herself. Hector, who feels unfinished, adds a missing piece through guitar lessons. Lenny accepts that his path is veering away from his childhood friends. Dan teeters between becoming a decent person and remaining self-centered. Like Debbie's lost necklace, the teens go on a "journey" this summer. Friendships change. Opportunities are taken, and opportunities are missed. Mistakes must be made. Moments crisscross as the teens search for their place in life.

About the Author

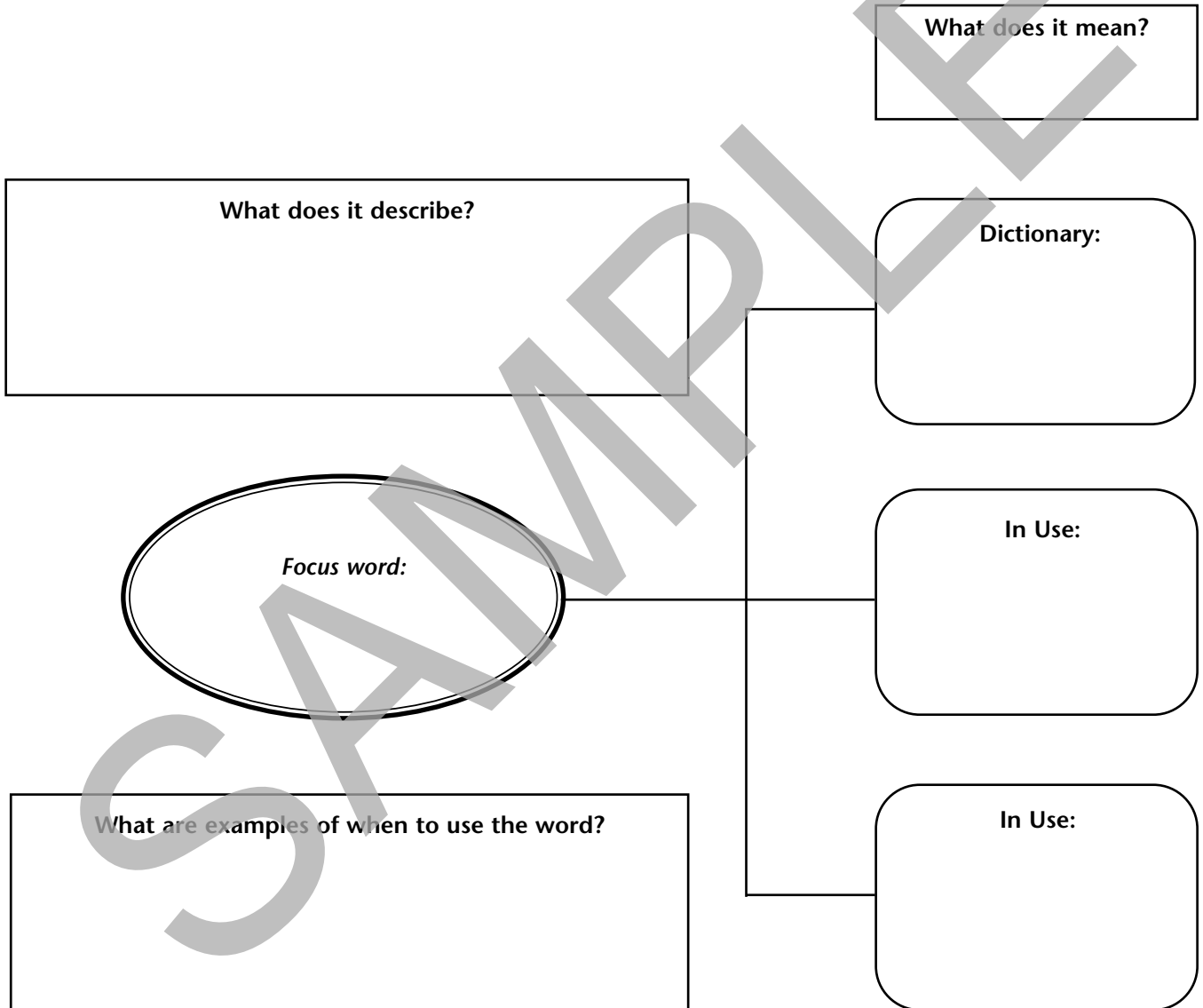
Lynne Rae Perkins grew up in Cheswick, Pennsylvania, a small town near Pittsburgh. Though she loved to read, she dreamed of becoming an artist. She studied art, earning her B.A. at Pennsylvania State University and her M.A. at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In 1993, Perkins showed her portfolio to the art director at Greenwillow Books, who asked her if she had ever written a story. Perkins then wrote a picture book, *Home Lovely*, which was accepted for publication. Her other picture books include *The Broken Cat* and the award-winning *Snow Music*. *All Alone in the Universe*, her first novel which also won awards, is a prequel to the Newbery Medal-winning *Criss Cross*. Perkins does the artwork in her books. She lives with her husband, daughter, and son in Suttons Bay, Michigan.

Background Information

As a late bloomer, Lynne Rae Perkins says she didn't socialize in high school; she thought something was wrong with her. She wants kids who feel the same way to know that "sometimes it just takes awhile, and you can have fun on the way..." In *Criss Cross*, she uses her teen experiences to show that "life doesn't always happen like it does in movies and books, but that's OK."

Vocabulary Word Map

Word Map for an Adjective



Understanding Values

Values represent people's beliefs about what is important, good, or worthwhile. For example, most families value spending time together.

Directions: Think about the following characters from the novel and the values they exhibit. What do they value? What beliefs do they have about what is important, good, or worthwhile? On the chart below, list each character's three most important values, from most important to least. Be prepared to share your lists during a class discussion.

The diagram is a mind map with a central oval labeled "Values". Six lines radiate from this central oval to six rounded rectangular boxes, each representing a character. Each box contains a numbered list (1., 2., 3.) for recording values. The characters and their boxes are: Debbie (top left), Hector (top middle), Lenny (top right), Dan (bottom left), Peter (bottom middle), and Mrs. Bruning (bottom right). A large, light gray watermark "SAMPLE" is oriented diagonally across the center of the page, overlapping the central oval and the boxes.

After you have finished the chart and participated in the class discussion, think about which character seems to have values most like your own. Write a paragraph that explains why you chose this character.

Chapters 1–2, pp. 1–25

Debbie wishes something good would happen to her soon. She twists her necklace as she reads an article about how important it is to be yourself, yet she wonders if she needs to become a different person. Hector compares himself to his older sister, Rowanne, and feels unfinished. When Rowanne takes him to listen to music at a college coffeehouse, Hector decides to learn how to play the guitar.

Vocabulary

loopholes (2)
disembodied (6)
aura (6)
plummeted (6)
dissenting (6)
sylph (6)
coalesce (7)
enigmatic (8)
psychically (13)
nonexistent (14)
trapezoidal (14)
inertia (15)
cosmic (18)
satori (18)
tentative (20)
liberation (23)

Discussion Questions

1. What does Debbie's wish tell you about her? *(Answers will vary. Suggestion: Debbie wants changes in her life, possibly because she is bored, lonely, or searching to find herself. pp. 1–2)*
2. What is the message in the article Debbie reads? What do the accompanying pictures seem to say? When the text and pictures are combined, what is the overall impression? *(The text is about how important it is to be yourself. The pictures recommend being someone else. Together, the article suggests a person can do both at the same time. p. 2)*
3. How is the loophole of a wish similar to the catch on Debbie's necklace? *(Answers will vary, but should include loopholes are openings, or opportunities, and the necklace is open unless the catch is closed tightly. p. 3)*
4. After comparing himself to Rowanne, what does Hector feel is possible? Why does he feel this way? *(Hector feels unfinished, still in process, but that he might mature into something like his sister has. He sees similarities between his sister's face and his, knows she has lost her roly-poly childhood, and that there is time for him to mature. pp. 6–7)*
5. What does Hector expect from his evening with Rowanne? What happens? *(Hector thinks eating peanuts in the crowded room will be the main entertainment. The guitar music deeply affects him. Hector sees an ordinary person transformed by playing music. He notices the girls are paying close attention to the guitarists. Hector decides to learn how to play the guitar. pp. 14–19)*
6. What helps the “unmoistened sponge” inside Hector become “receptive to the universe”? *(Hector is away from his regular routine—couch, TV, and pizza. p. 16)*
7. Why does Hector feel as if the world is opening? Do you think he is ready for any change, or is the guitar the only thing that would have affected him? *(Hector senses his life rearranging and the opportunity to go somewhere else. He feels himself changing. Answers will vary. pp. 24–25)*
8. How are Debbie and Hector similar? How are they different? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: Both want changes in their lives. Debbie wishes for changes; Hector takes action by deciding to play guitar. pp. 2, 7, 19)*
9. **Prediction:** Will Debbie's wish come true? What good thing will happen to her?

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: Begin Character Webs (see page 11 of this guide) for Debbie and Hector. Add information as you read the story.
2. Literary Analysis: Begin the Story Map on page 12 of this guide. Add to the map as you read.

3. **Critical Thinking:** Working with a partner, take turns making wishes that don't hurt anyone or cause any disasters. Check each other's wishes for loopholes. Decide whether it's possible to make the ultimate wish, one without loopholes.
4. **Creative Writing:** On page 7 of the novel, Hector compares his eyes to those of a flounder. Write a paragraph comparing one of your features to an animal.
5. **Art:** Research the invention of eyeglasses, and then imagine you're an artist from that time who needs glasses. Draw a scene as it would look before you received a pair of glasses. Redraw the scene as if you are wearing your new glasses.

Chapters 3–6, pp. 27–51

Debbie likes how the Beings in her science fiction novel telepathically find mates because her brain turns into a black hole whenever she talks to a boy. When she and her childhood friends listen to “Criss Cross,” a sick but humorous radio show, Debbie notices changes in the boys, and has a moment of awareness with Hector. Though Debbie and Patty agree clothing shouldn't matter, they alter the clothes their mothers buy them. Debbie doesn't notice when she loses her necklace.

Vocabulary	
prostrate	(27)
remnant	(28)
iridescent	(29)
regenerate	(30)
idyllic	(30)
chivalrous	(39)
winsome	(40)
tectonic	(40)
inadvertently	(41)
primeval	(42)
impenetrable	(44)
burbled	(45)
exasperated	(46)
subliminal	(47)
emanating	(47)

Discussion Questions

1. How do humans affect the Beings in Debbie's novel? How might the apple be important to the science fiction novel's story? (*Thousands of years of simple, peaceful living are upset when Humans arrive and offer an apple to the Beings. Answers will vary. Discussion could include that apples are often symbols of evil. p. 29*)
2. How does the peacefulness of the Beings' world make Debbie feel? Why might she feel this way? (*Debbie feels ornery and restless, wanting to turn up music, eat hamburgers, and collect material possessions. Answers will vary. Suggestions: The Beings' world is too peaceful without any problems to solve. Debbie may feel rebellious because she needs challenges. p. 30*)
3. The basis of Debbie, Lenny, Phil, and Hector's friendship is that they have known each other since they were little and automatically look for each other when nothing else is happening. Though they go meet new people, they can always come back to each other (pp. 34–35). What can you infer from this information? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: The friends are comfortable, yet don't cling to each other. Their relationships are flexible. They accept change.*)
4. Why is the radio show called “Criss Cross”? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: The show weaves together a variety of material, including sick but funny songs and jokes. It ends with “crossing” jokes. pp. 35–36*)
5. Why do you think Hector asks a “crossing” joke when he doesn't know the answer? (*The jokes on the radio remind Hector of his earlier thoughts about changes in girls and changes in himself. Answers will vary. Suggestion: He doesn't have an answer, but hopes his friends will. p. 36*)