



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Darkness Before Dawn**

Sharon M. Draper

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

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Sharon M. Draper

## 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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**ISBN 978-1-50203-726-8**

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research, critical/creative thinking, decision making, compare/contrast

### Comprehension

Predicting, summarizing, evaluating decisions, sequencing

### Writing

Letter, poetry, essay, chapter, song, summary

### Listening/Speaking

Interviewing, discussion, oral presentation

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, glossary

### Literary Elements

Conflict, characterization, foreshadowing, figurative language, theme, point of view, antagonist/protagonist, dialogue

### Across the Curriculum

History—art, seventh-century women; Social Studies—volunteer opportunities, homelessness, support groups; Art—collage, caricature, dance, drawing, fashion design; Health—eating disorders, CPR, nutrition; Science—botany

**Genre:** young-adult fiction

**Setting:** fictional Hazelwood High School in present-day Cincinnati, Ohio

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** coming-of-age, acceptance, friendship, fear, integrity, death/loss, unity, hope, innocence/experience

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

**Tone:** honest, informal, conversational

**Date of First Publication:** 2001

## Summary

In *Darkness Before Dawn*, the third book of the Hazelwood High trilogy, Keisha Montgomery struggles through a taxing senior year. Still grieving over the suicide of her ex-boyfriend, Andy Jackson, Keisha supports her friends as they battle their own demons. Later, she finds herself charmed by the smooth sophistication of the principal's 23-year-old son, Jonathan Hathaway. When Jonathan attempts to rape Keisha, she discovers that she, too, needs the support of friends and family and must overcome the past to live a full and successful life.

## About the Author

Sharon M. Draper was born in Cleveland, Ohio. Draper's father was the son of a slave, and though she never met her grandfather, her family's history has influenced much of her writing. Draper earned her B.A. from Pepperdine University in California and her M.A. from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She also holds two honorary doctorate degrees. She and her husband, Larry, have four children and reside in Cincinnati, Ohio, with their golden retriever, Honey. Draper taught both middle and high school for over 30 years and now writes full-time.

In 1997, Draper was named Ohio Teacher of the Year and went on to become the National Teacher of the Year. Among her other distinctions, Draper was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and is very involved with the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. She has traveled internationally sharing her passion for excellence in teaching and the importance of quality education.

Draper's other writings include the previous two books in the Hazelwood High trilogy, *Tears of a Tiger* (winner of the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults) and *Forged By Fire* (winner of the Coretta Scott King Award, Parents' Choice Gold Award, and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults), as well as *Romiette and Julio* and *Double Dutch*. She wrote *Copper Sun*, a book about the slave trade, after conducting extensive research and making several visits to different countries in Africa. She has also authored books for teachers, books of poetry, and the "Ziggy" series for children. Draper's advice to those who want to become writers is that they should become readers first.

## Prologue–Chapter 2

As she prepares to walk the stage at her high-school graduation, Keisha Montgomery retells the tale of the past year of her life. She begins with the day in April of her junior year when she discovered that her ex-boyfriend, Andy, committed suicide. The author reintroduces characters from the previous two books in the series both at the scene of Andy's death and at the all-school picnic, where readers learn more about Jonathan Hathaway, the principal's son, and Leon Hawkins—new characters to the series.

Vocabulary	
tinny	
procession	
console	
anticipation	
defiantly	
sauntered	
resounding	

### Discussion Questions

1. In what point of view is the book written? What is the tone of the narrative? (*first person; informal and conversational*)
2. Why do you think Keisha reflects on the tragic events of the last couple years as she prepares to give her farewell speech to the senior class? (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: Keisha wants her speech to be real and heartfelt, not static or disconnected from the emotional roller coaster she and her classmates have been on in the past year. Remembering will help her speak with meaning rather than emptiness.*)
3. Which characters does the author reveal in the opening scene, in which the narrator recounts the day that Andy died?

Considering this is the third book in a trilogy, do you approve of the author's choice to introduce many of this book's characters in such a dramatic scene? Explain. (*Keisha was close to Andy and remains close to his little brother, Monty. Other characters include Rhonda, Keisha's best friend, and Tyrone, Rhonda's boyfriend, who have become very close since their friend Rob's death. As Rob's best friend and the driver of the car in which Rob died, Andy probably struggled with guilt over his role in the accident and Rob's death earlier in the year. Kiara [Joyelle] is Rob's little sister, and her best friend is Angel, the younger sibling of Gerald, a friend of both Rob's and Andy's. Readers may sense that the characters are close, almost like family, partially due to the suffering they have already endured together. Answers will vary.*)

4. To deal with their grief, the students go to Eden Park to “[sit] by the reflecting pool and [talk] about stuff that [is] bothering [them]” (p. 15). Do you think the author's use of the name Eden Park is coincidental? To what does this name refer? (*Answers will vary. In the Bible, Eden is the name of the garden where Adam and Eve lived. It is known as a perfect, beautiful place devoid of sin and darkness.*)
5. Do you approve of Kiara's decision to go by her middle name, Joyelle? Why or why not? If you were to change your name, to what would you change it? Why? (*Answers will vary.*)
6. What memorable events or character introductions occur at the all-school picnic? What role, if any, do you think the new characters will play in the book? (*Answers will vary. Note Rhonda's comment about the seriousness of her relationship with Tyrone. Draper also offers more insight into Leon, the class clown, and B. J., a friend reintroduced from previous books in the series. The principal's son is also noted several times as he helps with the meal and watches the students play, sing, and remember their year.*)

## Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: On a separate sheet of paper, list similes, metaphors, and other analogies that appear in the book. As you read, add to your list. Each section in this guide will include examples in Supplementary Activities. Examples: **Similes**—“Like silent trumpets, the lights...” (p. 2); “sob like a baby” (p. 9); “the sun...like a big red piece of candy” (p. 27); “gentle as a kitten” (p. 28); **Metaphors**—faces: unwrapped packages (p. 3); Tyrone: fire, Rhonda: wax (p. 27); Angel: a feather (p. 31); **Personification**—“darkness seems like it’s trying to grab me” (p. 1); “shadows are breathing on my neck” (p. 2); “death is just gonna jump in and grab me” (p. 20)
2. Art: Draw or paint a picture based on Keisha’s description of Monty leaving her to return to his mother: “[Monty] gave me one last hug, left the swing, and ran across the street to his mother, the arms of Andy’s jacket dragging the ground” (p. 14).
3. Foreshadowing: Begin the Foreshadowing Chart on page 23 of this guide, and add to it as you read the novel. Use the chart to organize your thoughts and make predictions about the story as you read. In this section, pay particular attention to the introduction of new characters.

## Chapters 3–5

School begins, and Keisha and Rhonda become friends with Jalani, a new student and former model from New York. At a cross-country practice, Keisha finds herself next to Jonathan Hathaway, whom she tries to ignore. Keisha bumps into Rhonda and Tyrone on her way back to the cross-country bus and notices that a fellow runner, Rita, is terribly upset and injured. After Jonathan chastises her, Rita runs away. Later, Keisha learns that Tyrone and Rhonda have decided to take their physical relationship slowly. Rita never returns to school.

### Vocabulary

jubilant  
subdued  
ebony  
sweltered  
instituted  
bespectacled  
insistent  
striving

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the author’s portrayal of Joyelle and Angel on their first day of high school is realistic? How do you think you will feel once you are in high school and amidst upperclassmen? *(Answers will vary.)*
2. What are your first impressions of Jalani? Does she seem to be a likeable character? Explain. *(Answers will vary.)*
3. Why do you think Gerald doesn’t believe his sister when she says she ate the lunch he made for her? Why is Gerald concerned about whether his sister eats lunch? *(Answers will vary. Clearly, Gerald is a protective brother who concerns himself with Angel’s well-being. The discussion about Angel’s lunch is Draper’s first hint to readers that Angel’s eating habits are unhealthy.)*