NOVEL UNITS

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Dicey's Song

Cynthia Voigt

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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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

Listening/Speaking
Drama from differing points
of view, role play,
monologue, interviewing

Comprehension
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and effect

Writing
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narrative

Thinking
Predicting, decision-making

Vocabulary
Word mapping, context
clues, prefixes/suffixes

Literary Elements
Characterization, flashback,
conflict, plot, figurative
language

Summary of *Dicey's Song*

The Tillerman children, abandoned by their mother without money or a home, have found their unknown grandmother. Dicey and her brothers and sister have difficulty in accepting and adjusting to life with Gram. The Tillerman children are haunted by the knowledge that mother is mentally ill and in a hospital. Gram has to learn to deal with the joy and the trouble of grandchildren.

Introductory Information and Activities

Prior to Reading:
You may wish to choose one or more of the following Prereading Discussion Questions/Activities. 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.

Prereading Discussion Topics:
Maturity: What does it mean to be mature? How would you define immaturity? Give some examples of mature vs. immature behavior. Use a T-diagram. How does one become mature? Is maturity at age 13 the same as maturity at age 21?

Learning new skills: Have you ever been faced with an unusual problem which required you to learn some new skill or skills? What was the situation? How did you feel at first? What skills did you lack? How did you learn these skills? How did you feel when the whole thing was over?

Facing a frightening situation: Have you ever been in a situation where you were very frightened? What was the situation? How did you feel at first? What made you afraid? What did you think about? How did you overcome your fear?

Thinking positively: Have you ever heard the expression, "the power of positive thinking"? What does it mean? Do you believe in it? If not, why not? If so, when have you seen it work for someone else? When has it worked for you?

On separation from family: Have you ever been separated from a parent or family member for a period of time? How did you feel about the separation? What was the hardest part? What did you do to make yourself miss the parent or other family member less?
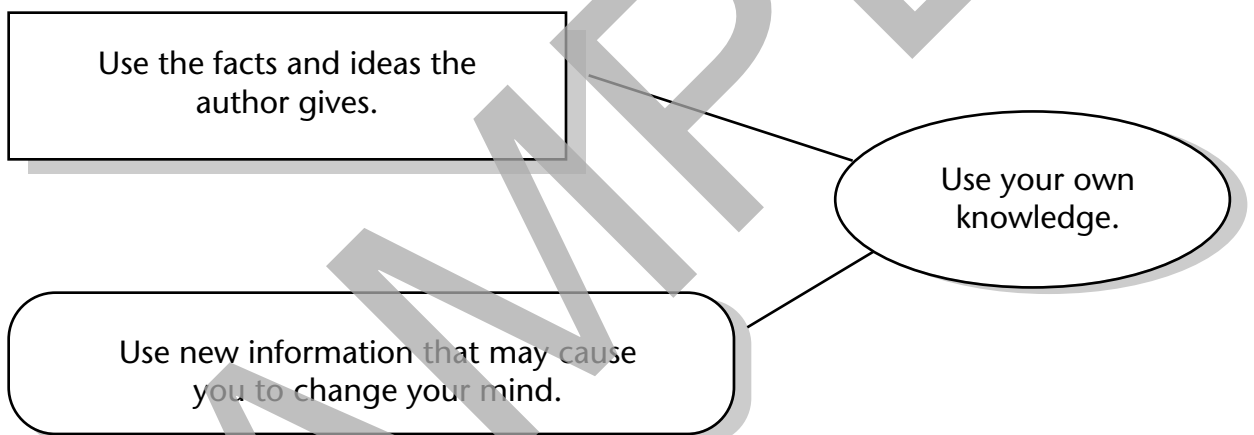
Initiating Activities:
1. We are going to read a really great story, but before we start the story we are going to make up what we think this story could be about. Here are some clues about the story. Given these clues what might happen in the book?

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.

Use the facts and ideas the author gives.

Use your own knowledge.

Use new information that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Chapter 1-Pages 1-21

Vocabulary:

illogical 3	hunkered up 4	mottled 7
hankered 7	relapsed 8	resolved 10
intensity 11	lingered 12	harmonized 13
underpinnings 14	turgid 16	enlist 19
shucking 20	confer 20	

Vocabulary Activity:

List the vocabulary words on the board or on a sheet of paper in the form of a table. Pronounce the words. Ask the students to rate their knowledge of each of the words (as a group or individually). After the students have read the chapter, ask if they would change any of the classifications.

I Can Define   I Have Heard   I Don't Know

Words:

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is telling the story? What is point of view? *(Point of view is the angle from which a narrator tells a story. The students may not be sure after reading just Chapter 1. In third-person omniscient point of view, the narrator of the story is an outsider, but can give us insight into what the characters are thinking or feeling. In third-person limited point of view, the narrator can give us some insight into the characters' thoughts and feelings, but this is limited to one character or only a few characters.)* Ask the class to find examples of point of view on pages 1, 7, 9, and 20. The students will support their ideas of point of view using examples from the novel. How would the novel be changed if it were told from Dicey's perspective? from Gram's perspective?

2. What did you learn about Dicey? Begin an attribute web for Dicey. Attribute webs are a kind of semantic mapping. It is important to emphasize that attribute webs are just a visual way to organize and remember ideas about particular characters. Students should be encouraged to modify this format provided by adding categories or subdivisions. (See pages 11-12 of this guide.)

3. What are your impressions of Gram? *(gruff; did not wear shoes; was poor; was proud; said lots of things that were a bit of a puzzle; was a bit of a puzzle herself)* Let us begin an attribute web of all the things we can learn about her.

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 the 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, done individually, or finished as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character feel in this picture? How would you feel if this happened to you? How do you think the character feels?)

- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him 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 student attribute webs and specific characters, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. You can also include inferential thinking.

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