

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey

Margaret Peterson Haddix

NOVEL UNITS[™]

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DON'T YOU DARE READ THIS, MRS. DUNPHREY

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research, critical thinking, decision-making, creative thinking

Comprehension

Predicting, evaluating decisions, sequencing, summarizing

Writing

Letter, essay, review, poem, short story, skit, brochure, journal

Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion, acting

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, context clues, antonyms

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, characterization, point of view, theme, symbolism, figurative language, foreshadowing

Across the Curriculum

Art—caricature, sketch, painting; Social Studies—Child Protective Services, social work, abusive relationships; Health/Science—battered-wife syndrome; Math—budget, credit cards

August 28–October 1

Tish Bonner begins writing in a journal as part of a school assignment, labeling most entries “Do not read.” She writes about strange, secret things in the first few entries and is assured of her privacy when her teacher seems ignorant of anything Tish has written. Slowly, Tish begins to write more about her life—her opinions on school, her friends, the way she feels about her younger brother Matt, her depressed mother, her absent father, her deceased grandmother, and her boss at Burger Boy who punishes her by reducing her work hours after she refuses his offer of a date.

Vocabulary	
	crochet
	brigade
	dissect
	aptitude
	stashed
	egotist
	giggle
	equivalent
	dignified
	feminist

Discussion Questions

1. What is the premise of the novel? How is it written? Are you interested in reading further? Why or why not? (*The story is written as a series of journal entries, which may be kept private as long as they are of an acceptable length and frequency. Answers will vary, although many students will express immediate interest in reading someone's secret thoughts which s/he does not want anyone else to know.*)
2. What are your first impressions of Tish Bonner? What do you learn about her as you read her journal? (*Answers will vary. Tish Bonner has “big hair,” chews gum constantly, does not think of herself as “prissy,” and does not worry about how her teachers think of her. Though she seems intelligent and scores well on aptitude tests, she appears not to care about school and is a C-student. She must work after school to pay for the things she wants. Her mother also works but does not earn much, and Tish takes care of her younger brother.*)
3. Describe Tish’s friends. How is Tish different from them? Why do you think she considers these girls her best friends when others seem like them? (*Tish’s best friends are Sandy, Rochelle, and Chastity. Sandy has money, but likes to shoplift. Chastity is the new member of the group. Sandy and Chastity have boyfriends, and Rochelle always likes a new boy. Tish does not shoplift [though it may be more from fear of getting caught than from a concern for right and wrong], does not usually conform to the group’s thinking, and has no interest in boys. Answers will vary.*)
4. What does Tish remember as a happy childhood moment? What is ironic about this? (*Tish was cuddled up with Matt and their grandmother in their warm home, with the lights shining from the Christmas tree. This is ironic because Tish and Matt were cuddling with their grandmother to avoid being involved in a terrible fight between their parents. There was screaming all around them, yet Tish remembers this as a happy time because she was close to her brother and grandmother.*)
5. How does Tish feel about Matt? How does Matt feel about Tish? Do you think they have a good relationship? (*Tish tries to be a good sister and care for Matt since their mother is rarely around and is sometimes oblivious to what Matt needs. Tish tries to be patient with Matt even though she is not always successful. Tish worries about Matt witnessing the turmoil within their family and in their home. She is kind and gentle toward him. Matt loves Tish unconditionally, and he is always willing to accept her punishments because he knows that she loves and cares about him. Answers will vary.*)

6. How does Tish feel about Mrs. Dunphrey? How do you know this? (*Tish believes that Mrs. Dunphrey is a good teacher. She thinks Mrs. Dunphrey is smart [although keenly unaware of her students' personal lives], kind, trustworthy, and innovative. Although Tish believes that teachers in general are clueless and give meaningless assignments, she has a special respect for Mrs. Dunphrey. Answers will vary, but students should cite the numerous journal entries where Tish "speaks" directly to Mrs. Dunphrey.*)
7. Describe Tish's conflict with Bud Turner. Why does she attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully? (*Bud Turner is much older than Tish, and Tish finds him repulsive. Bud wants to take Tish out on a date, but she refuses his offer. Bud is offended and assigns Tish fewer work hours the next week. Tish wants to quit, but she decides to resign professionally by talking to the manager, Mr. Seagrave. She needs to keep her job so she can earn enough money to buy Matt a Nintendo for his birthday.*)
8. After sharing a happy moment with her family, Tish feels that "for the first time in years, everything might be all right in the Bonner house" (p. 25). Of what is this feeling an example, and do you share Tish's optimism? (*This feeling is an example of foreshadowing. Answers will vary.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Time Line: Using the Time Line on page 10 of this guide, record the major events in Tish's life as she relates them in her journal. This activity will continue as you read the novel.
2. Figurative Language: Begin recording similes and metaphors on a figurative language chart. Continue adding to the chart as you read the novel. Examples: Similes—"Mom and Dad yelling ... like the wind" (p. 15); "I felt like I'd done something awful like drowning a kitten" (p. 16). Metaphors—Susan Stanwick and Mike Hardin's brains: computers (p. 9); Mom: ghost/shadow (p. 14)

Time Line

Directions: In the numbered boxes below, write eight major events in Tish's life as she grows up. Write the dates in her journal. On the lines below the graphic, make a prediction about how Tish's and Matt's lives will change after their mother returns.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Making Decisions

Directions: Choose three to seven possible solutions to the problem below.

- State each solution in a short sentence.
- Design three to five "criteria" (questions you can ask to measure how good a particular choice may be).
- Rate the criteria for each solution: 1 = yes; 2 = maybe; 3 = no.

Problem: Tish and Matt's mother has asked each of them to search for their father.

Solutions ↓	Criteria		
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			