



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Downriver

Will Hobbs

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Downriver

Will Hobbs

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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Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research,
evaluating, analysis

Comprehension

Predicting, cause and effect,
characterization, comparison/
contrast

Writing

Research report, poetry,
character analysis, newspaper
account

Vocabulary

Vocabulary words

Listening/Speaking

Role-playing, dramatic
reading

Literary Elements

Literary devices, conflict,
symbolism, plot analysis,
protagonist/antagonist

Across the Curriculum

Map study, character collage,
pen-and-ink drawing, current
events, cooperative learning,
music

Information on the Novel

Genre: Fiction

Setting: Wilderness area—San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado; Colorado River rapids in the Grand Canyon

Date: Contemporary

Point-of-View: First-person narrative

Themes: self-discovery, courage, trust, friendship, adventure, and survival

Summary

Jessie, the protagonist of the story, and seven other troubled teenagers have been sent to Discovery Unlimited, a nine-week wilderness program run by Al, a Vietnam veteran. The camp is designed to teach them to solve problems, make responsible decisions, and develop their potential. After Al guides the group in mountain climbing and a short whitewater rafting trip, they begin to make plans for a ten-day run down the San Juan River. Calling themselves “Hoods in the Woods,” the group decides rafting the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon will be wilder. They rebel against Al, steal his van and rafting equipment, and embark on their own adventure. A series of challenges and conflicts reveal the true character of each person as the struggle for power becomes more important than the struggle for survival. By the time the group is rescued, Jessie has found personal courage and previously undiscovered leadership capabilities.

Characters (in order of appearance)

Jessie: 15-year-old narrator sent to Discovery Unlimited by father

Al: Vietnam veteran; leader of Discovery Unlimited; reminds Jessie of her dad

Troy: piercing blue eyes; seems older; a “heavy” who sizes up others; becomes “leader” for Grand Canyon adventure

Rita: formerly ran a burglary ring in New York

Star: frail; homeless; believes in mysticism (Tarot cards and crystals)

Freddy: loner; seems to have sixth sense; strong; becomes a leader

Adam: “clown” who doesn’t take anything seriously

Pug: the “Big Fella”; follower

Heather: easily frightened; tries to impress others; deserts rest of group before Grand Canyon adventure

About the Author

Will Hobbs was born August 22, 1947, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He taught language arts and reading for seventeen years before becoming a full-time author. He and his wife, Jean, live in the mountains close to Durango, Colorado, in a rock house Will built. He enjoys reading, hiking, backpacking, fishing, and river rafting. He and his wife have made the raft trip through the Grand Canyon—a 225-mile trip with 160 rapids—ten times. Hobbs' experiences while whitewater rafting down the Colorado River form the basis for the group's rafting experiences in *Downriver* and its sequel, *River Thunder*.

Hobbs has stated that reading inspired him to write and that his novels are usually a combination of half life-experience and half reading. He adds, however, that *Downriver* is based almost entirely on personal experience. He loosely based the characters in *Downriver* on real people. Hobbs hopes that his books will inspire young people to explore and discover the wonders of the natural world and to experience the world vicariously through the characters in his stories.

Additional Information about *Downriver*

Awards

- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- One of ALA's 100 Best of the Best Books of the past 25 years
- An American Bookseller Pick of the Lists
- A California Young Reader Medal Winner

Sequel

River Thunder by Will Hobbs, copyright 1997, published by Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers

Supplementary Material

White River Rafting Through the Grand Canyon by Ann Pellagrini

(<http://www.adventureliving.com/home/wwr/index.html>)

Wilderness River Adventures (<http://www.riveradventures.com/>)

Other Internet Resources

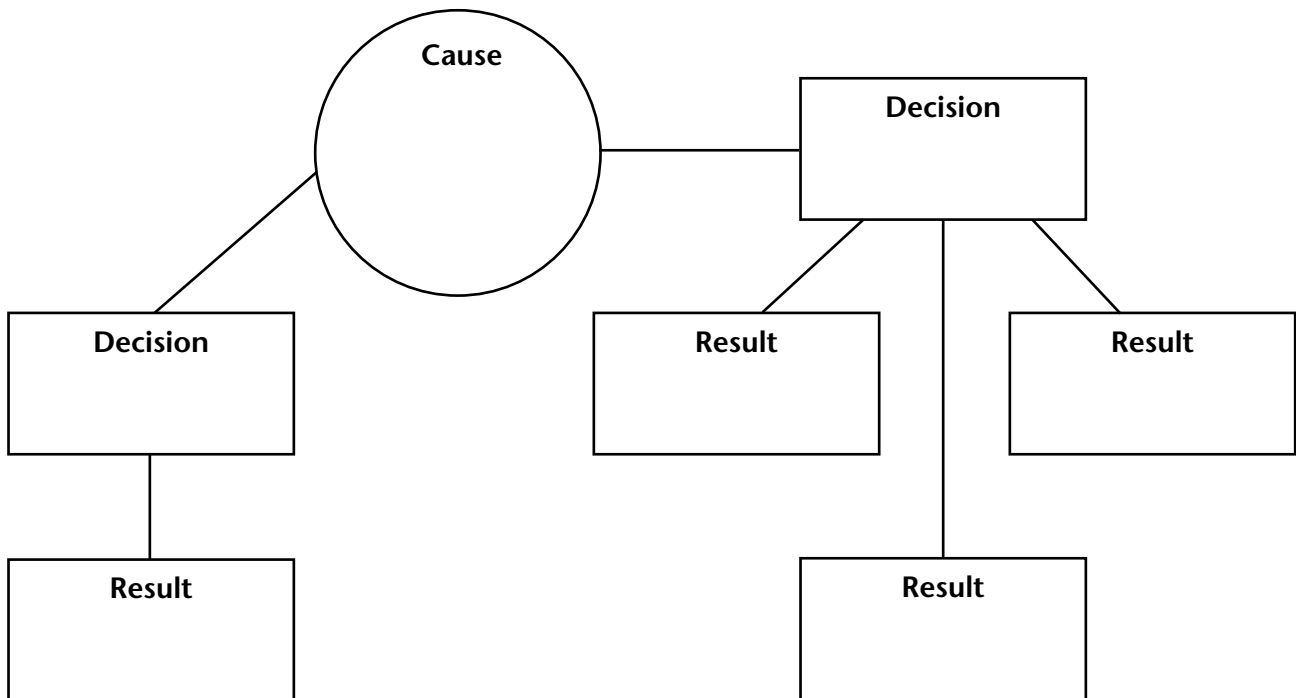
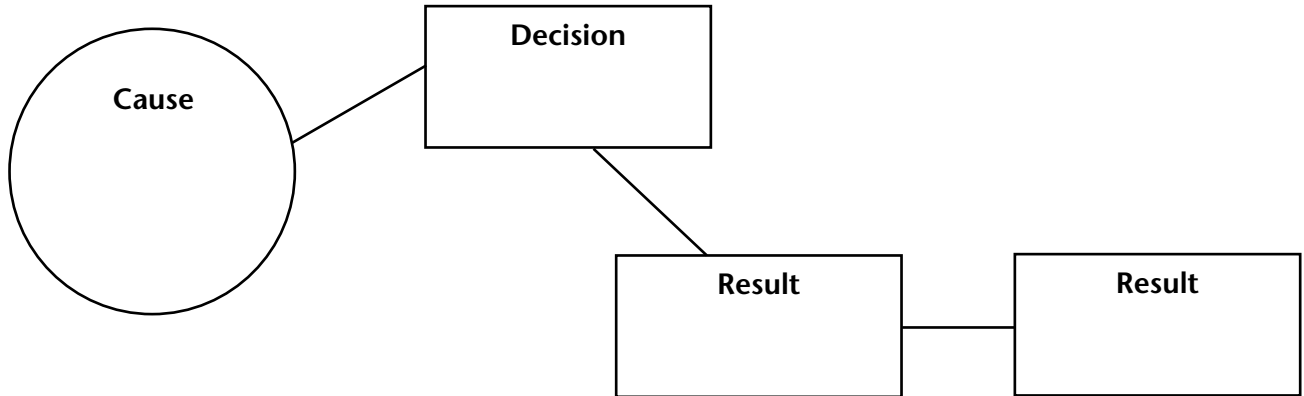
Outward Bound Experiences

Grand Canyon National Park

Grand Canyon River Running: The Unofficial Guide to the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon

Cause/Effect Chart

Directions: Make a flow chart to show decisions the characters made, the decisions he or she could have made, and the result(s) of each. (Use your imagination to speculate on the results of decisions the character could have made.)



Chapters 5–8

Vocabulary

catapulted	translucent	windfall	consensus
riveted	larceny	ominous	lyrical
torque	finesse	eddy	reverberating
karma	forlorn		

Chapter 5

The group, with the exception of Heather, is elated after Westwater and wants more whitewater rafting. Heather is fearful after falling into the water and nearly drowning. Troy gains status by buying treats for everyone and becomes the self-assigned leader of the group. Following his lead, the group takes Al's van and rafting equipment and heads for the Grand Canyon.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the impact of Westwater. (*Heather is flung into the water and caught in a hole. She almost drowns, becomes hysterical after rescue, remains fearful, and refuses to get back on the water.*)
2. What is the group's destination after Westwater? How long will this part of the trip take? (*San Juan River; ten days on the river*)
3. Who first suggests stealing the van and rafting equipment and striking out on their own? What is the result? (*Troy. Everyone but Heather responds excitedly. Jessie feels it is a way to "get even" with her dad. Troy suggests heading for a run in the Grand Canyon; others concur. They leave Al stranded.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Simile: boat folded like a sandwich
2. **Prediction:** Will Jessie reconcile with her dad?

Chapter 6

After leaving Al stranded, the group enters the Navajo Nation. Jessie insists they stop at a pay phone, and she calls her dad to assure him she is okay. This chapter presents the climax of the novel: when the group arrives at Lee's Ferry, the launching point, and they realize this is their last chance to back out. They launch both boats into the Colorado River at the Grand Canyon.

Discussion Questions

1. As they head for the Grand Canyon, whom does Jessie feel their lives will depend on? What action shows her fear and hesitation? (*Freddy and Troy; she has them stop so she can telephone her dad, not revealing their location but assuring him she is okay.*)
2. What is the point of departure? What happens? (*Lee's Ferry; the group rigs up equipment; Heather deserts; they launch into river. Troy justifies his lack of a river map.*)

3. What is the climax of the novel—the “point of no return”? (*The group reaches the moment when they must either back down and return or launch into the river. They decide to launch their boats.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Simile: rock formations like office buildings made of stone
2. **Prediction:** What will be the outcome of the trip down the river?

Chapter 7

Discussion Questions

1. What does Adam name the first rapid? Explain what happens there. (*River Thunder; Troy rows the gear boat and the others are in the paddle boat. Because of Pug’s lack of expertise in ruddering, the paddle boat almost tips over. They are elated when they emerge unhurt.*)
2. What is the result at the second rapid? (*Because of Pug’s inept ruddering, Jessie is thrown out. Star rescues her. Freddy takes charge and tells Adam to rudder.*)
3. What is Troy’s reaction after his boat stands up straight in the rapid? What effect does this have on Jessie? (*He seems to lose his enthusiasm and asks Jessie to ride with him to keep the front end down. Jessie agrees because she feels Troy needs her.*)
4. Why does Troy refuse to scout a major rapid? What is the result? (*He is too taken with past successes and is having too much fun. Troy and Jessie’s boat is knee deep in water; the paddle boat flips over. It takes the entire group to right it.*)

Supplementary Activity

Literary Devices—

Metaphor: ears: drums of doom

Allusion: “Into the valley of death ... rowed the six hundred.” (“The Charge of the Light Brigade” by Alfred Tennyson)

Simile: rapid looked like a staircase of white water

Simile: pulled me ... like a tuna fisherman pulling a big one out of the sea

Allusion: Goliath (Biblical giant, 1 Samuel 17:4)