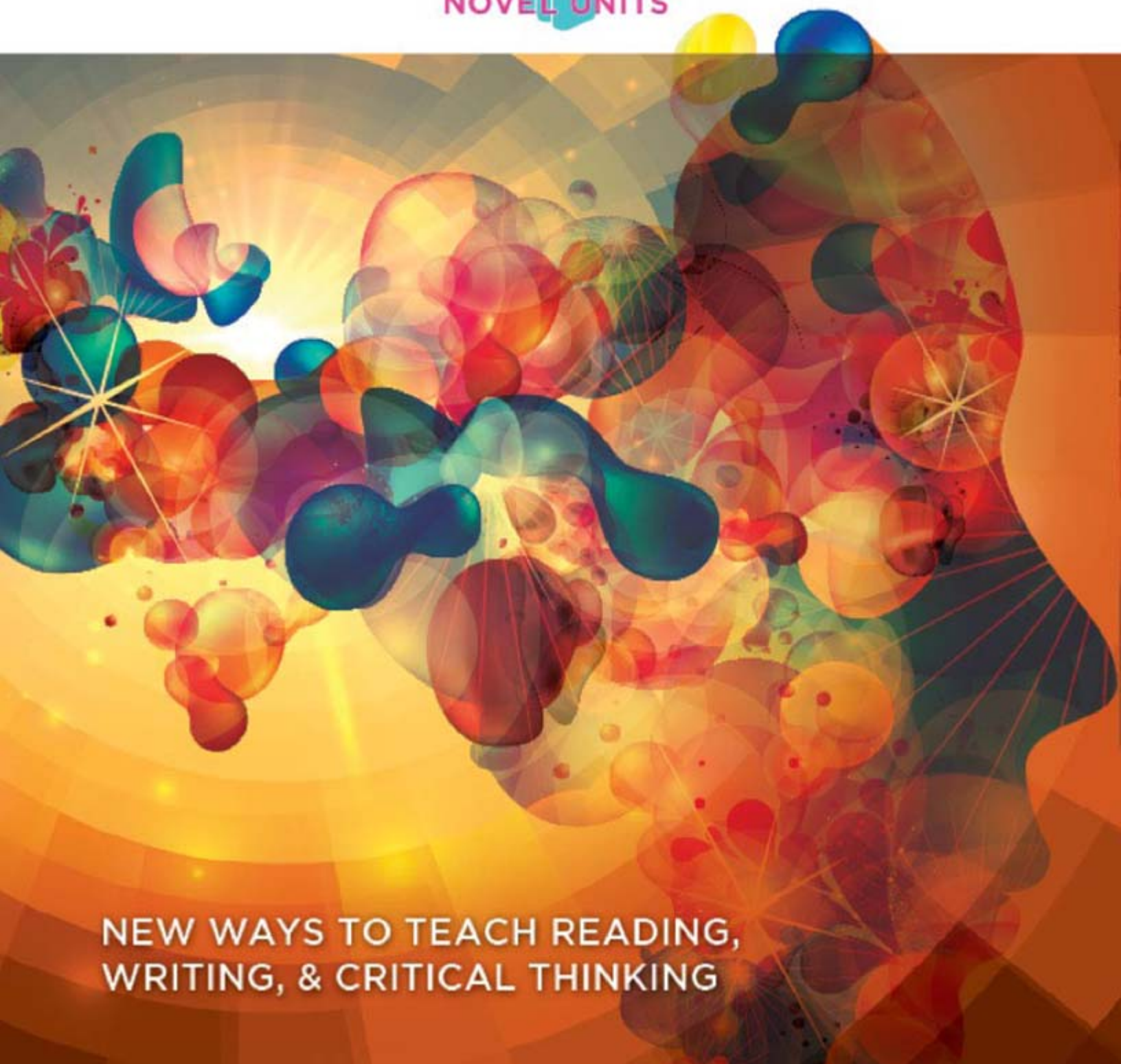


**Teacher Guide**

**Grades 7–8**

# **The Face on the Milk Carton**

**Caroline B. Cooney**



**NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,  
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING**



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# THE FACE ON THE MILK CARTON

by  
Caroline B. Cooney

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
Mina Watts

### Note

The 2012 Ember paperback edition of the novel, © 1990 by Caroline B. Cooney, was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN: 978-0-385-74238-2

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

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evaluation

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, sequencing,  
identifying attributes,  
supporting judgments

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essay, dialogue, alternate ending,  
poem, summary, recommendation,  
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### Vocabulary

Word maps, glossary, application

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Art—collage, sketch, book  
illustrations, novel cover;  
Research—National Child  
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to Janie?* (1993)



## Chapters 1–3

For sophomore Janie Johnson, it is just a regular day of school—that is, until lunchtime, when Janie sees a photograph of her much younger self on the back of a milk carton. The name under the picture is Jennie Spring, and the information on the carton describes how three-year-old Jennie was kidnapped from a shopping center in New Jersey 12 years before. Although stunned, Janie interacts fairly normally with her friends and parents the rest of the day. However, Janie's mind is racing as she contemplates whether her parents are capable of kidnapping.

### Vocabulary

marital  
memorable  
jaded  
mortified  
anonym  
ruefully  
anonym  
virtually  
commute  
contours  
technique

### Discussion Questions

1. Why did Janie gradually change her name on school assignments from “Jane Johnson” to “Jayne Johnstone”? (Janie feels that both her first and last names are boring and generic. Changing her first name to “Jayne” makes her feel more interesting and attractive. She feels that her last name, Johnson, is “hardly a name at all; more like a page out of the phone book” [p. 3]. Janie wonders what her parents, considering that their last name is rather plain, would have given her such an uninteresting first name. Students may also wish to discuss Janie’s age and how many teenagers struggle with identity issues.)
2. Describe Reeve. Why does Reeve struggle so much in school? (Reeve has been Janie’s neighbor and friend since childhood. He is a senior at Janie’s school who overdoes homework and makes poor grades. Reeve has three siblings—Megan, Lizzie, and Todd—who excelled in school and attended prominent colleges such as Cornell, Princeton, and Stanford. Reeve’s parents and siblings often criticize him for his lack of effort in school. Answers will vary. Some students may assume that Reeve struggles in school due to low intelligence. However, other students might think that Reeve’s performance in school suffers mostly from feeling overshadowed by his competitive, overachieving siblings.)
3. What is Janie’s reaction to seeing her own picture on a milk carton? (At first, Janie feels “something evil and threatening” settle over her. She can hardly speak or move as she realizes she is seeing her own picture on the milk carton. She is shocked and is only able to endure the rest of the day because her body functions automatically. When she goes home from school with Reeve, she is barely able to process what he is saying because she is so preoccupied with wondering about her real name, family, and birth date.)
4. Why does the world “shift” for Janie inside Friendly Ice Cream? (When sitting inside the ice-cream parlor with Reeve, Janie suddenly recalls sitting on a swiveling stool in an ice-cream parlor as a little girl, with a pretty woman sitting next to her. Answers will vary, but most students will likely guess that Janie has had a flashback to around the time she was kidnapped. Students should note that the white polka-dot dress from the milk carton fits so prominently into Janie’s “daymare.”)
5. Why does Janie examine the family’s furniture and framed photographs when she arrives home? (Answers will vary. Janie seems to be reviewing what she knows as she “[walks] through the house, touching” [p. 25]. The family’s furniture and décor in her mother’s taste reassure Janie that she knows herself and her family, even while walking through her childhood home and seeing pictures of herself on the walls make Janie feel comfortable, safe, and, most importantly, like her parents never could have [or would have] kidnapped her.)

6. What startling realization plagues Janie as she looks at the photographs of herself on the walls, and why? *(Though she has realized it before, Janie notes that there are no baby pictures of her. Now that Janie knows Jennie Spring was kidnapped at age three, she begins suspecting once again that she could be the missing girl. Janie realizes that her parents' explanation of the lack of baby pictures—that they didn't buy a camera until Janie was five—does not explain why they never had studio portraits done or received copies of pictures others took.)*
7. Why do you think Janie questions Mrs. Shields about Mr. Johnson's strictness? What answer does Mrs. Shields provide? *(Answers will vary. Though she doesn't express it, Janie likely thinks her mother was strict because she was constantly afraid people might recognize Janie and remove her from the Johnsons' home. Mrs. Shields' explanation is simpler. She explains to Janie that, in life, there are "too many dreadful possibilities out there" and "mothers have nightmares about their babies...drowning in a neighbor's swimming pool [or] snapping the spine playing football" [p. 31]. She also offers the possibility that Mrs. Johnson was overprotective of Janie because Janie is an only child.)*
8. What difference between herself and her parents does Janie note. Why is she cataloging these differences? *(Janie notes that her mother's decorating taste [deep, intense colors] differs drastically from Janie's taste [pale, subtle colors]. Janie also notes physical differences between her and her mother, such as the fact that her mother's feet are long and narrow, while Janie's feet are short and wide. Finally, while listening to her parents talk, Janie notes that "they spout conversation continually" while Janie has "more listening [her] than talking" [p. 34]. Answers will vary, but Janie seems to be collecting evidence that proves she is not Frank and Gertrude Johnson's real daughter.)*
9. Why does Janie keep having "daymares"? *(Answers will vary. Perhaps memories of Janie's past are surfacing, or she's now seriously contemplating the possibility that she was kidnapped as a young girl. However, some students might feel that Janie's desire to have a more interesting name and life are causing her mind to play tricks on her.)*
10. **Prediction:** How will Janie further investigate the Jennie Spring kidnapping?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Name Art: Write your first and last name on a sheet of paper, and create a collage around your name (using clippings from newspaper and magazine, photos, paint, ink, etc.) of colors, pictures, and words that you feel best represent you. Then, following Janie's example, change some letters in your name. Write your altered first and last name on a separate sheet of paper, and create a new collage for that name. Afterward, compare your two collages and discuss as a class how a person's name can make up a large part of his or her identity.
2. Research: Find information about the National Child Safety Council or a similar organization that has drawn national attention to child abduction since the 1960s through its missing children milk carton program. Write a one-page report describing the council's mission and how corporations work with the council to keep children safe.

## I Predict...

**Directions:** Spend a few minutes looking at the cover of the novel and flipping through its pages. What can you predict about the characters, the setting, and the problem in the novel? Write your predictions in the spaces below.

The Characters	The Setting	The Problem

From the information you gathered above, do you think you will enjoy reading this novel? Circle your response on the scale below.

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

I will not like this novel.

I will really like this novel.

Explain your prediction on the lines below.

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**Directions:** In the “flashes” below, illustrate three key events in Jamie’s life that occur in chapters 16–18. On the lines below each “flash,” explain why the scene you illustrated is important.

[illegible]