

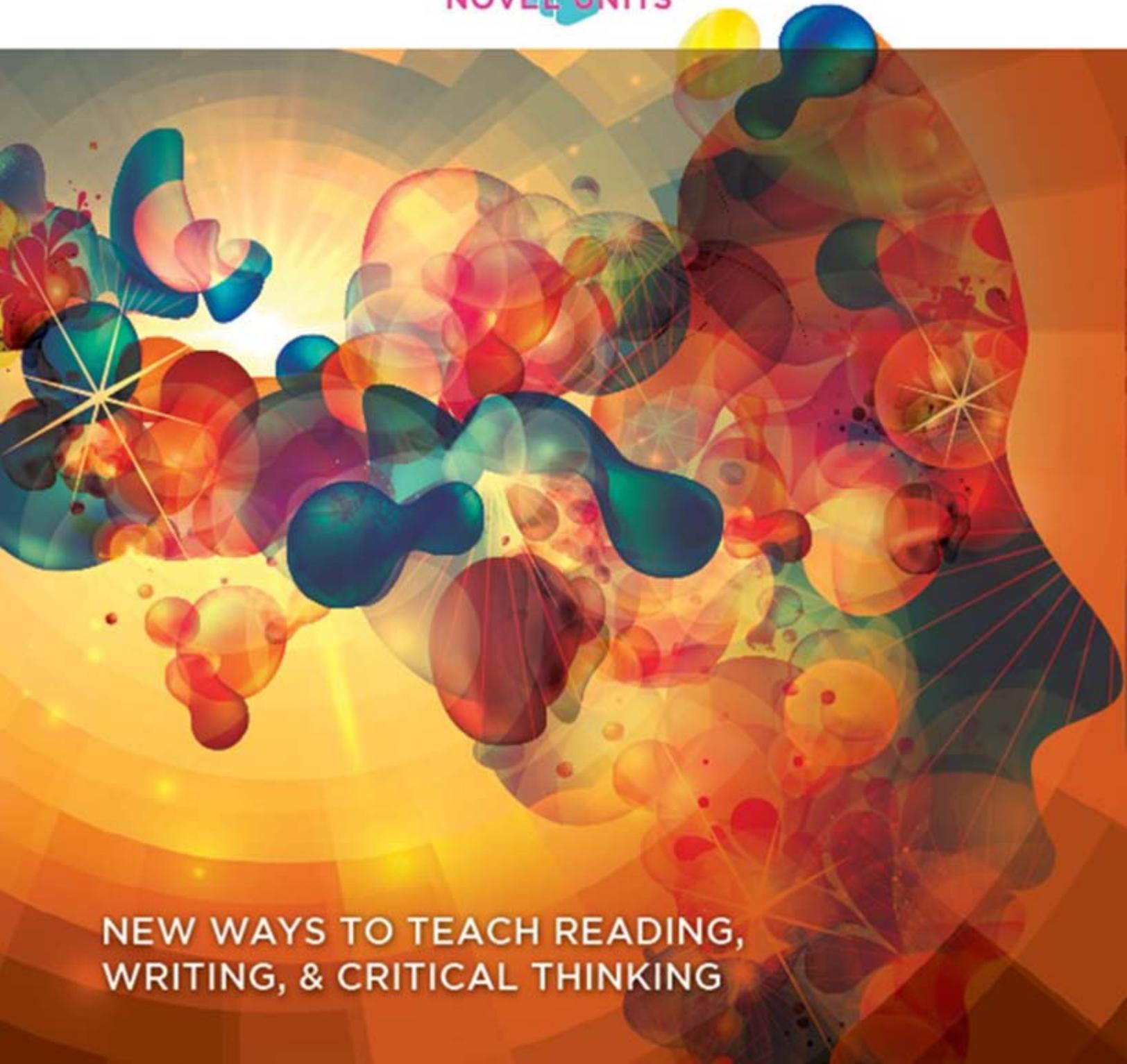
Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

A Family Apart

Joan Lowery Nixon

NOVEL UNITS[®]



NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING



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A FAMILY APART

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: 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

Comprehension

Research, compare/contrast,
identifying attributes,
sequencing

Literary Elements

Foreshadowing, plot,
metaphors/similes

Vocabulary

Context clues, definitions,
synonyms, antonyms

Listening/Speaking

Debate, discussion, performance

Writing

Expository, persuasive, creative,
haiku, acrostic, book review,
journaling

Critical Thinking

Predictions, identifying main
ideas/themes, evaluating and
supporting judgments

Across the Curriculum

Art—drawing, storyboards,
poster design; Social Studies—
geography, time lines, games
and fashions of the 1900s;
History—child labor, Pony
Express, Missouri Compromise,
Compromise of 1850, Kansas-
Nebraska Act, Thoreau’s *Civil
Disobedience*; Music—19th-
century songs, appropriate
background selections

Chapters 1–3

Jennifer and Jeff are spending the summer on their grandmother’s farm in Missouri. An old family photograph leads Grandma Briley to tell her grandchildren about the 19th-century woman pictured. Grandma narrates the tale of the six Kelly children and their mother, who are struggling to survive. There is no time for school. Each of the children is expected to contribute to the family’s welfare. Frances Mary, the eldest child, suspects her brother Mike is involved in some mischief when he returns home late one night. The next day she follows him, only to discover Mike has learned to pick pockets. She confronts Mike about stealing, but a police officer intercedes and arrests Mike. Frances watches in horror as the officer leads her brother away.

Vocabulary

deliberately
ornate
precariously
pungent
viscous
immolation
vanquished
sentinels
subsided
trough
pallet
reluctant
instinctive
sauntered
indignation
tentatively

Discussion Questions

1. Explain how *A Family Apart* is a flashback. (*Grandma Briley is telling her two grandchildren, Jennifer and Jeff, a story about her great-grandmother Frances.*)

2. What motivates Frances to work so hard? (*She realizes her mother needs every penny the children can earn to keep her family fed and clothed. Her mother models a strong work ethic, and Frances admires her mother.*)

3. Why can't Frances and the other children go to school? (*Their mother can't afford to pay for school clothes and books. In their reality, school is a privilege, not a right.*)

4. Why does Frances' heart ache when she sees the woman in the bottle-green coat? (*It hurts her to know her mother can't have such pretty clothes. It is frustrating that they work hard but nevertheless have few things to enjoy.*)

5. Why is Frances so upset when the police officer on the street says, "Then be along with your girl! Go about your business! Don't dawdle here with your fingers where you don't belong!"

(p. 11)? (*She doesn't see why these people believe nice clothes make them better. In her heart, she feels that, despite outward appearances, she is every bit as good as they are. The implication is that others can shop, but she and "her kind" have had no options, such as stealing. She feels a strong sense of injustice toward her social class.*)

6. Mrs. Kelly says, "The woman sees only the dark side of life, and for that we should pity her" (p. 14). What does this quote reveal about Frances' mother? (*Mrs. Kelly does not outwardly feel sorry for herself, despite the fact that her family lives in poverty and her husband is dead. She tries to project a cheerful optimism to her children.*)

7. Describe the house Frances has built in her imagination. How does she dream about it? (*It is a beautiful red brick house with windows that overlook a vast green lawn and a lake. The living room is decorated with pretty lace curtains and embroidered pillows. There is wonderful food set out on an elegant table. The dream represents comfort and security. Her dream offers hope for the future and escape from the hardships of the present.*)

8. Why is there such a strong bond between Frances and her mother? (*Frances is the oldest and has taken on a lot of responsibility since their father died. Mother and daughter lean on one another for support. Frances' bond with her mother grows when she finds Ma crying for her dead husband.*)

9. What causes Frances to be suspicious of Mike? (*She spots him sneaking home late one evening, and he then pretends to be asleep. Frances is used to looking out for her siblings and notices anything out of the ordinary.*)
10. How do the Kelly children live differently from children today? (*The children seem to think nothing of working long hours to help their mother. They don't expect their lives to be centered on school and play. They are street smart from being independent most of the day. They take on supervisory roles with their younger siblings.*)
11. Why is Frances so worried when she learns her school friend, Mary, will stay at the Children's Aid Society? (*She knows that children at the Children's Aid Society are often taken away from New York on the orphan trains.*)
12. How does Mike justify stealing to Frances? Why doesn't he care when Frances tells him he is being "untrue" to Da? (*He says he has no choice but to steal to pay for food the family needs. There is not much work for a boy of Mike's age, so stealing is an easy means to an end. He must realize his actions are wrong because he does not involve Da. He is angry at Da for leaving them alone to fend for themselves.*)

Supplemental Activities

1. Literary Devices/Foreshadowing: Complete the Foreshadowing Chart on page 23 of this guide for Chapters 2 and 3.
2. Art: Paint or draw a picture of the house that Frances imagines the family living in, or research the fashions of the 1850s and draw a picture of a lady in the bottle-green coat.
3. Social Studies: Divide into two groups. One group is responsible for finding ten facts about child labor in today's world. (unicef.org is a good source, active at time of publication) The other group should find ten facts about child labor in 19th-century America. Compare and contrast the groups' findings.
4. Social Studies: The back cover places the novel in the year 1856. Research the events mentioned in Chapter 2. What inconsistencies can you find? Note the events that occurred in 1856, and the signing of the *Lady Elgin* on September 7, 1860, was two months, not four weeks, before Lincoln's election.)
5. History: Learn to play some common children's games from the 1860s such as cat's cradle, hopscotch, pick-up sticks, Jacob's ladder, rick, marbles, or nine pins. Spend an indoor recess playing some of these games.

Chapters 4–6

At the courthouse, Ma and Frances are hopeful that Mike will be released from custody. After some persuasion, the judge agrees to Ma's request and frees Mike. There is little joy among the Kelly children as they realize the price for Mike's freedom is the loss of their mother and their home in New York. Ma has arranged for the children to leave immediately on an orphan train. The children feel abandoned and betrayed. Frances realizes she must not be separated from her youngest brother, Pete. She assumes the identity of a boy and demands to be called "Frankie." The Kellys meet Katherine Banks and Andrew McNair, who accompany some 30 children on the orphan train. Frances is shocked when she sees armed men leading away a runaway slave. Captain Taylor tells her that citizens have no choice but to uphold the law and return slaves to their rightful owners. Megan and Frances share their fears that the siblings will be split up.

Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their 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 to help to make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could either be an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

Use the clues and ideas the author gives.

Use your own prior knowledge.

Apply all new information (i.e., from class discussion) that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions