



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Flip-Flop Girl

Katherine Paterson



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Katherine Paterson

## 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

### Thinking

Comparing, evaluating,  
analyzing details, explaining,  
summarizing, categorizing,  
organizing, observing

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparing, story  
mapping, defining,  
sequencing, describing,  
point of view, rhyming,  
teaching

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, role-play,  
dramatic activities,  
defending opinions,  
describing, persuasion,  
recording, monologue

### Vocabulary

Target words, target word  
maps, use and effectiveness  
of words, synonyms, word  
comparisons, sorting,  
root/base words,  
alphabetizing

### Literary Elements

Character analysis, setting,  
plot, figurative language,  
motivation, foreshadowing,  
suspense, cliffhanger

### Writing

Research, short paragraphs,  
captions, short story,  
episode, interviews, surveys,  
poetry

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## Summary

The father of Vinnie and Mason Matthews dies of cancer. Mason has not spoken since his father's death. The children and their mother move in with Grandma Matthews in a dingy gray house in the small town of Brownsville, Virginia. Vinnie meets Lupe, nicknamed the flip-flop girl because of the shoes she wears, in Mr. Clayton's fourth grade class. Lupe lives with her grandmother in a shack surrounded by a pumpkin patch. An old railroad trestle casts its shadow over the patch. Lupe's father is in jail for the murder of Lupe's mother. Mason's silence, Lupe's shoes and a game of hopscotch, Mr. Clayton's red car, and Vinnie's red barrettes combine in a story about the ramifications of grief, friendship, tolerance, and compassion. Vinnie and Lupe, the outsiders of their class, join forces to help one another through hard times. Knock-knock jokes help Vinnie and Mason remember their daddy as they reconcile to his loss. Would all of this have been possible without the compassionate understanding of Mr. Clayton?

## About the Author

Katherine Womeldorf Paterson was born October 31, 1932, in Qing Jiang, Jiangsu, China. She attended King College, A.B., 1954; Presbyterian School of Christian Education, M.A., 1957; Naganuma School of the Japanese Language, Kobe, Japan, 1957-59; and Union Theological Seminary, New York, N.Y., M.R.E., 1962. Paterson has been a teacher, a missionary in Japan and, since 1964, is an author of materials for church use and novels for young people. Her father's occupation as a missionary required that the family move frequently. As she recalls, this made Paterson the "weird kid" wherever she went. This gave her "preparation for life" and substance for her stories.

## Background Information

### Bereavement

Although no one's grief follows a predetermined pattern, people who are grieving share many similar experiences, and this process seems to take a common shape. Mourning is not just feeling sad. It is the specific psychological process by which human beings become able to give up some of the feelings they have invested in a person who no longer exists, and extend their love to the living. Mourning is hard, emotional work. It is putting memories into focus, and allowing those who are grieving to be touched by the feelings they carry with them. It is struggling with guilt and anger about being left alone. It is taking up the disrupted threads of life and finding new patterns to weave. It is giving up a person who is no more. Most adults respond to the terrible news that someone they care about has died by becoming numb. This initial phase can last from a few hours to a week. In general, the bereaved person feels very little during this period. Periodically the numbness is pierced by intense emotions of extreme distress, anger, or both. As this phase subsides, the grieving person enters a period of yearning and searching for the lost figure. This may continue for months, or, in some cases, years. Overlapping with this yearning phase is a stage of disorganization and despair. Finally, with the acceptance of the death, the bereaved person reaches the last phase of mourning, a stage of reorganization.

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## Shoes

The historic writings of the Egyptians, the Chinese, and other early civilizations contain references to shoes. There are early references to shoes in the Bible, and shoes are mentioned as being used in binding bargains by the Hebrews. Shoes, in one way or another, figure into the folklore of different races. These stories continue to be told to children.

The first shoes were similar to sandals—simple pieces of rawhide or pieces of plaited grass strapped to the feet. Sandals continue to be the most popular footwear in many warm countries. Moccasins were the foot protection of the cold countries, and continue to be preferred by many living in this climate.

As the design of shoes developed throughout history, little attention was devoted to the way they fit or their comfort. Perfection in workmanship and extravagance was the goal, rather than comfort and protection. As late as 1850, most shoes were made on straight lasts, there being no difference between the right and the left shoe.

Boots with high tops, pointed toes, and 2-inch heels were popular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the time of the Napoleonic Wars, officers and other gentlemen wore jackboots, including the Wellington. By 1868, Wellingtons were almost exclusively an American style, and were standard issue to military officers during the Civil War. Thus it was that this boot went west with the army and the nation. By 1870, the standard boot worn by frontier horsemen was a variation of the military issue, and by the 1880s, the cowboy boot was emerging.

The Industrial Revolution changed the making of shoes with the development of machines that could attach inner to outer soles, and machines that could sew uppers to lowers. Modern mass-production evolved, and these methods are currently in use.

## Introductory Activities and Information

1. **Previewing the Book:** Look at the cover of the book. What has the cover artist chosen to tell about the story? At what time of the year do you think the story takes place? What do you think is the setting of the story? Do the girls pictured look like they are friends? What messages might their looks convey? Do you think one of the girls is the flip-flop girl? Why?
2. **Bulletin Board:** Form groups of students with similar interests to use a bulletin board to go with an area of study. For example:
  - A. **Relocation**
    1. Make a large representation of a moving van to put on the board.
    2. Make a caption for the board, such as: *Moving Right Along*, *Moving On*, *A Moving Experience*, etc.
    3. **Topics**
      - a. one thing to take along
      - b. imagined destination

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## Attribute Web

The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

The diagram is an attribute web. It features a central circle with a horizontal line inside. Four lines radiate from the circle to four rectangular boxes: 'Acts' (top-left), 'Feels' (top-right), 'Looks' (bottom-left), and 'Says' (bottom-right). Each box has a thick black border. Below each box are four numbered lines for notes.

**Acts**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Feels**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Looks**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Says**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

- 
2. Why do you think Lupe wants to congratulate Mr. Clayton? Make a list of some possible reasons. Choose one. Make a greeting card with a rhyming message for Mr. Clayton. Examples of possible reasons: birthday, anniversary, graduation, promotion, retirement, new car, winner of some contest or lottery, etc.
  3. Do some research about graffiti. Summarize and share your findings.
    - a. general definition
    - b. your location, definition, and the applicable law
    - c. education, books, research summaries
    - d. gangs
    - e. neighborhood organizations and abatement projects
    - f. magazines and articles on the Internet—Graffiti Related Links on the World Wide Web

What is your point of view regarding graffiti? Write a personal response. Interview others and compare and contrast their opinions about graffiti to your own.

## Chapter 6: Pages 54-64

Lupe shares her toasted pumpkin seeds with Vinnie the next day at recess. At this time, Lupe tells Vinnie that her father did not kill her mother. After school, Vinnie finds Mason in the school office. Mason runs away from Mr. Sharp, who tells Vinnie to bring Mason back to the office. As Vinnie chases after Mason, they meet Lupe on the stairs. Lupe offers to take Mason home while Vinnie returns to the office. Mr. Clayton overhears Vinnie tell the office staff that Mason has left, and he offers to take Vinnie in his car to look for Mason. Vinnie gives Mr. Clayton the directions for the long way to her home, hoping that Lupe and Mason are taking the shorter route. Lupe gets Mason home safely.

### Vocabulary

mocking 56      readjusting 60      antiseptic 60      liable 62  
ambling 63

### Discussion Questions

1. What does Lupe share with Vinnie at recess? (*Pages 54-55, Lupe shares her toasted pumpkin seeds, and the information that her father did not kill her mother.*) Do you think Lupe finds it difficult to talk about her father to Vinnie? Why or why not? Do they share something in common?
2. Where does Vinnie have to go to get Mason after school? (*Page 57, Mason is in the school office.*) Why is Mason there? (*Page 58, Mason spit into the twenty juice cups at snack time. "He made the other children cry."*) What is the result of Mr. Sharp's reprimand of Mason? (*pages 58-64*) Use a cause and effect chart to answer this question. When examining the reason for events in a story, it is often found that one cause has several results, or that several causes led to the same result. For example:

Mason spits into juice cups: the kindergarten classmates and teacher are unhappy; Mrs. Paxton takes Mason to the assistant principal, who is in charge of school discipline, after

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school; Vinnie arrives at the school office; Mr. Sharp verbally reprimands Mason; Mason runs out of the office; Vinnie is told to bring Mason back; Vinnie runs after Mason; Mason and Vinnie meet Lupe on the staircase; Lupe offers to take Mason to his home; Mason goes with Lupe; Vinnie goes to the school office; Mr. Clayton takes Vinnie in his car to search for Mason; Vinnie arrives home and tells Mr. Clayton that Mason is there; Mr. Clayton leaves; Lupe brings Mason to Vinnie; Lupe goes to work for Mrs. Winston before Vinnie can thank her for her help; Vinnie decides that she will not tell her mother about Mason's escapade or of her ride in Mr. Clayton's car.

Do you think Vinnie and Mason thought of the consequences of their behavior at school? Discuss behavioral consequences.

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis—Simile: Similes are comparisons using such words as *like*, *as*, *similar to*, *resembles*, etc. to highlight the comparison. The author, Katherine Paterson, uses several similes in Chapter 6. For example, on page 57, Mr. Sharp tells the following to Vinnie about Mason: "Talking sense to this child is like plowing sand."

Find at least three additional similes in this chapter. Tell what things are being compared in each simile. Write an original simile, and explain the comparison made.

2. Literary Analysis—Character's Motivation: A character's actions often tell the reader something about the character's thoughts and feelings. Write out questions and answers for some of the behavior exhibited by the story characters in this chapter. Examples of questions: Why do you think Lupe offers to take Mason home (page 60)? Why do you think Mason goes with Lupe without a struggle (page 60)? Why do you think Vinnie allows Lupe to take Mason home (page 60)? Why do you think Vinnie doesn't tell Mr. Clayton that Lupe is with Mason (page 61)?
3. Start character attribute webs for Lupe and Mr. Sharp. What do you already know about these two people? Add to these webs as the story continues.

### Chapter 7: Pages 65-72

Vinnie takes the long way to school so that she can see Mr. Clayton's car. Heather and her clique question Vinnie about her brother, the "worst kid in kindergarten," according to Heather's mother and her mother's friend. Lupe interrupts the conversation, and takes Vinnie away from the group. Vinnie notices the sneakers that Lupe is wearing. They were given to Lupe by Mr. Clayton. That night in bed, Vinnie thinks about her grandmother, the day her father died, and of the move to Brownsville.

### Vocabulary

lagged 66

prissy 68

pursing 69

chirpy 71

### Discussion Questions

1. What do Heather and her clique talk to Vinnie about at recess time? (Page 67, *The girls have heard that Mason is "the worst kid in kindergarten."* Heather's mother's best friend is Mrs. Paxton's room mother for the afternoon session of kindergarten. Heather's mother has heard all