



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Gentlehands

M. E. Kerr

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Gentlehands

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TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Concept mapping, research,
brainstorming

Writing

Journaling, letter-writing,
narrative, poetry, description

Listening/Speaking

Role-play, drama, music,
discussion

Comprehension

Predicting, inference

Vocabulary

Word mapping, cooperative
learning activity

Literary Elements

Juxtaposition of scenes,
characterization, double
entendre, flashback, motif,
cliffhanger

Summary

The narrator, Buddy Boyle, recalls the shattering events of his 16th summer. The son of a police officer in the town of Seaville, New York, Buddy has fallen for Skye Pennington, a beautiful rich girl who spent summers at Beauregard, her family estate in Seaville. Buddy's parents don't approve of his spending so much of the money he earned working at the local ice cream shop on clothing for dates with Skye. They make it clear that they are uncomfortable about his "crossing to the other side of the tracks" to date the daughter of an oil tycoon, and they consider his attempts to "fit in" with Skye's crowd evidence of growing snobbery.

Feeling uncomfortable at his first Beauregard party—a catered affair at which he met Skye's father and a journalist, Nick De Lucca—Buddy impulsively decides to take Skye to meet his maternal grandfather, Grandpa Trenker. With Skye behind the wheel of the family "Jensen," the two drive to Montauk for a visit with the well-to-do, cultured Frank Trenker—a man Buddy has rarely seen because of the bitter estrangement between Buddy's mother and her father. Skye is duly impressed by Grandpa Trenker—his love of opera, his books, his antique furniture, his paintings, his birdfeeders, and his rapport with neighborhood raccoons.

Back home that night, Buddy's father comments on how fast Skye was driving and asks him to take along his five-year-old brother when he goes clamming with his best friend, Ollie. The next morning at work, Buddy deliberately waits until his boss at the Sweet Mouth Soda Shoppe, Kick, has been mellowed out by his first joint before asking to use the phone. After leaving a message for Skye with "Peacock," the butler, Buddy's best friend Ollie appears wanting full details about the date. Skye then shows up and arranges to drive Buddy to her pool after work. At the pool, Buddy meets Skye's mother, some snooty friends of Skye's—who make fun of Buddy's Orlon sweater—and once again, Nick De Lucca, who gives Buddy a ride home.

Buddy describes Beauregard to his parents in glowing terms—from the heated pool to the six-car garage—and his father gets increasingly angry. After dinner, his father explodes and punches him in the neck, accusing him of being "full of himself" and breaking his promise to Streaker.

Although he is grounded for two weeks, on Sunday Buddy puts Streaker off again by promising him a "magic mystery thing" later, then goes off to see Skye. She presents him with a cashmere sweater and the two spend the afternoon picnicking, swimming, and playing backgammon with her friends. That night, a bonfire is made and Mr. De Lucca wanders over as Skye and her friends are talking about various Jewish acquaintances—making fun of their names—and telling anti-Semitic jokes ("Did you hear the story about the Jewish Santa Claus?"). De Lucca reveals that he is Jewish, and describes how his cousin was murdered in a concentration camp.

Buddy lets his grandfather know that he wants to become more cultured, and Mr. Trenker gladly teaches him about music, art, food, clothing—even romance. As Buddy and his grandfather grow closer, Buddy's situation at home grows more strained. His grandfather gives him permission to move in for a few days and offers him the use of his jeep. Grandpa Trenker even manages to get Buddy's mother to come for dinner. (Buddy has always been aware of her resentment toward her father for "deserting" her mother after the move to the U.S. As Frank Trenker tells it, both married too young

due to pregnancy, neither had fond affection for the other, and Buddy's grandmother wanted to go to the U.S. with her own mother while he wanted to stay in Germany with his family.) The dinner is cut short when Grandpa Trenker finds a raccoon caught in a trap and rushes it to the veterinarian.

At his grandfather's urging, Buddy decides to start using his middle name, Raymond. After Kick's wife throws out a bag of Kick's marijuana, Buddy retrieves the bag and presents it to a delighted Skye; both get stoned. Skye tells Buddy a "secret": Mr. De Lucca is looking for the sadistic SS guard who murdered his cousin. A little later, when Grandpa puts Tosca on the stereo, Skye blurts out her "secret" when she recognizes the "gentle hands" aria that the SS officer used to play for the Jews he guarded; outside, to Buddy's disgust, she asks—mildly suspicious—when his grandfather came to this country. Grandpa admits to Buddy that De Lucca has spoken with him about his suspicion that Grandpa is Gentlehands, but tells Buddy not to be "alarmed" by this case of "mistaken identity." Soon an article in the local newspaper details De Lucca's charges about the atrocities Trenker supposedly committed (sicking an attack dog on De Lucca's young cousin, tormenting homesick Italian prisoners by playing Tosca). Someone slits the throat of Trenker's dog, Mignon, and Grandpa immediately asks Buddy to make a call to New York saying that the package from Trenker is on the way. When Streaker talks about "Nazi killers," Buddy angrily points out that they are half-German, as is Streaker's beloved Mrs. Schneider, the woman who always has brownies for Streaker. Distraught, Streaker goes to her house and begins breaking windows.

The horrible truth about Trenker soon becomes evident to Buddy, though, as the pieces fall into place. Buddy gets a note from his grandfather saying that he is going away. The paper publishes pictures of his grandfather as a young man in Argentina, pictures of the house in Cuba where Trenker was staying, firebombed by the Jewish Defense League (Buddy remembers his grandfather talking about the death of the woman he loved in a fire), and mentions fellow-SS Officer Werner Renner (Buddy remembers his grandfather mentioning his friend Werner, a stamp-collector).

That August, at a "Future Party" at Beauregard, De Lucca thanks Buddy for giving him the tip that led the authorities to the stamp shop owned by Werner Renner. Buddy's grandfather is still at large. Buddy makes it clear to Skye that he knows that their relationship is ending, along with the summer. He makes a final visit to his grandfather's home and finds that his grandfather has been there ahead of him; the raccoon has trashed the house and the bird feeders have been removed. Buddy sees the sweater Skye had given him lying on the floor and leaves it, anxious to leave everything about that summer behind him.

About the Author

Marijane Meaker (aka M.J. Meaker, Ann Aldrich, M.E. Kerr and Vin Packer) was born on May 27, 1927 in Auburn, NY. She was encouraged from an early age in her love of reading and writing by her father, a mayonnaise manufacturer, and by her English teachers; her mother, however, did not think that writing was a proper avocation for "ladies." As a teenager, she was a self-described "troublemaker" at boarding school, where she didn't earn very good grades. Not surprisingly, many of her award-winning young adult novels convey an interest in/sympathy for youngsters who are having a hard time.

Using Character Webs

Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character, or completed gradually as information unfolds. They may be completed individually or as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character act? How do you think the character feels? How would you feel if this happened to you?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him/her to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the characters described in student attribute webs, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. Inferential thinking can be included in the discussion.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.

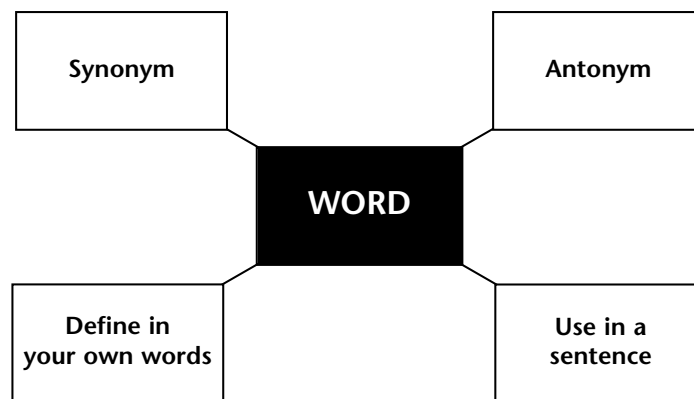
Chapters 1-2, pages 1-18

Vocabulary

towhead 1	seedy 1	feinted 4	suppressed 7
chagrin 10	milling 10	cliques 10	maitre d's 11
filet mignon 11	gargantuan 13	anemic 13	wise 13
spiritualist 15	astral 15	token 16	

Vocabulary Activity

Word mapping is an activity that lends itself to any vocabulary list. For words that have clear antonyms, the following framework would be suitable:



Students might enjoy coming up with variations on this framework. For example, instead of listing antonyms, students could provide line drawings to illustrate the target word.

Cooperative Learning Activity

Each individual within a small group is responsible for three or four words. Each group member teaches the others about these words by sharing his/her maps with the others. Students are tested individually on all the words, but all members of a group get bonus points if everyone achieves a certain score.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your impressions of the narrator? How old is he? (16) What does he look like (*tall, handsome*) What do you know about his family? (*He has a five-year-old brother; his father is a police officer.*) Begin an attribute web (see pages 11-12 of this guide).
2. Why is Buddy interested in Skye? What is she like? Would she be a friend of yours? (*rich, beautiful, self-absorbed*)
3. What do Buddy's parents think of his dating Skye? Are they being fair to him? What would you say to him if he were your son? (*They warn him against dating someone not of his "class" and against spending so much money on clothes to impress her.*)

-
4. What sort of relationship does Buddy have with his father? Is there anything good you can say about it? *(Although his father is authoritarian and yells at him, he does try to talk with his son; Buddy is able to kid him about not making the same mistake his father did, marrying too young.)*
 5. How did Buddy meet Skye? How did his life change from that point on? *(She and her friends came in while he was working at The Sweet Mouth Soda Shoppe; he became obsessed with her, fantasizing about her, and rehashing their conversations.)*
 6. Why doesn't Buddy's mother want him to be like her father? *(She considers her father a snob.)* What does Buddy know about him? Why doesn't he know Grandpa Trenker better? *(Buddy knows that his grandfather is wealthy and lives in a big house by the sea. He rarely sees the man because his mother is angry that he separated from her mother and never kept in touch while she was growing up.)*
 7. How does Buddy feel at the party? How would you feel? *(uncomfortable, out of place)*
 8. Who is Nick De Lucca? Does Buddy like him, on first acquaintance? *(A journalist, Nick De Lucca makes Buddy uneasy by calling him a "townie.")*
 9. What are Skye's parents like? How do they fit the stereotype of "rich parents"? Have you ever met real people like them? *(Skye's father is an oil tycoon; his mother studies astrology and invites "token" guests—a writer, a black, etc.—to big parties.)*
 10. What happens as Skye and Buddy walk out to the "Jensen"? *(They kiss.)* How do you think that kiss influences Buddy to decide to go see his grandfather with Skye? *(Buddy wants to sustain the moment by impressing Skye with his wealthy relative.)*
 11. **Prediction:** What will Buddy's grandfather be like?

Writing Activity

When the story opens, apparently Buddy's mother has asked Buddy's father to talk with Buddy. Write that pre-opener scene, where Buddy's parents talk about the problem they see developing.

Literary Analysis

An author must decide on the order of scenes. Often the placement of two scenes side-by-side (**juxtaposition**) creates a certain effect. What is Buddy's mother's reaction to his white outfit? What is Skye's reaction, in the next scene (page 10)? What do the contrasting reactions show you about the two women? *(Both are kidding Buddy, but his mother's comment—comparing him to Prince Charming—is a build-up, while Skye's—"You look like a waiter"—is a put-down.)*

Chapters 3-4, pages 19-38

Vocabulary

formidable 20
relent 34

keeshond 21
strategy 34

undaunted 22
unethical 35

aria 23
swindler 35