



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Homeless Bird

Gloria Whelan



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Homeless Bird

Gloria Whelan

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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

Identifying attributes, sequencing, research, compare/contrast, brainstorming, investigation

Comprehension

Story map, summarizing, inference, cause and effect, main idea, predicting

Writing

Personal writing, poetry, journalism/reporting, memoir, character journal, creative writing, travel brochure

Vocabulary

Target words, synonym, word webs, cultural words, context clues, definition, pronunciation, parts of speech

Listening/Speaking

Dramatizing, surveying, discussion, music, poetry recitation, presentation

Literary Elements

Symbolism/imagery, foreshadowing, setting, characterization, plot development, irony/paradox, idioms

Across the Curriculum

Crafts—quilting, beading; Art—drawing, bulletin board, collage, mobile, illustration, music, dance; Science—astrology, technology, climate; Math—currency conversion, statistics; Geography—research, maps, demographics

Genre: fiction

Setting: India; late 1990s

Point of View: first person

Themes: confinement, charity, choice, hope

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. society/tradition

Style: narrative

Tone: hopeful

Date of First Publication: 2000

Summary

Koly, a teenage girl from a small village in modern-day India, faces harsh confinement when two families follow their ancient customs without regard for Koly's feelings. At the age of thirteen, her arranged marriage forces her to move into a new family's home and separate from her beloved parents and brothers. Several ominous signs foretell the fate of her young marriage. The bridegroom, Hari, is gravely ill. His desperate parents arrange the marriage hoping to collect enough dowry money to travel to the sacred and healing Ganges River. When Hari dies during the trip, Koly's life with his family becomes a prison in which she must obediently fulfill household duties under the authority of her mother-in-law, Sass. Her only relief is the embroidery she learned from her own mother and her friendship with her sister-in-law, Chandra. In the midst of her binding role as a young widow, she receives charity from her father-in-law, Sassur, who teaches her to read. After Chandra gets married and Sassur dies, Koly must survive with the scolding Sass. On their journey to a new home in Delhi, Sass abandons Koly in an unfamiliar, menacing city where she learns to defend and sustain herself. She slowly shapes her own future with strength, spirit, and courage.

About the Author

Gloria Whelan is a poet and award-winning author who resides in Michigan with her husband, Joseph. Whelan has written many books for young readers, including *Night of the Full Moon*; *Goodbye, Vietnam*; *Angel on the Square*; *The Indian School*; *Once on This Island*, which won the 1996 Great Lakes Book Award; *Farewell to the Island*; *Return to the Island*; and *Miranda's Last Stand*. Whelan's books have also been honored by the International Reading Association, the Educational Press Association of America, and the Society of Midland Authors. Whelan's *Homeless Bird* received the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2000.

Major Characters

Koly: narrator; teenage girl who endures and overcomes oppression with obedience, patience, and courage after being widowed at age thirteen

Hari: Koly's husband; becomes ill with tuberculosis at thirteen and dies

Sass: Koly's mother-in-law; overbearing; controls Koly without love or understanding

Sassur: Koly's father-in-law; permits Sass to control Koly but finds enough compassion to teach her how to read; dies in his sleep

Chandra: Koly's sister-in-law; befriends Koly; marries and moves away

Maa Kamala: Koly's House Mother; compassionately yet firmly guides Koly and other abandoned widows to a life of independent survival after their abandonment

Tanu: young widow; becomes Koly's best friend and confidante in the widows' home

Raji: teenage boy; leads Koly to the widows' home and shares Koly's longing for the simple joys of village life; eventually falls in love with Koly and proposes marriage

Minor Characters

Maa: Koly's mother

Baap: Koly's father

Gopal: Koly's older brother

Ram: Koly's younger brother

Mr. Govind: Koly's boss at the bazaar booth where she strings marigold garlands

Mr. Das: Koly's boss at the embroidery shop

Mrs. Devi: Koly's benefactor; finances the widows' home

Background Information

Holy State

Vrindavan is located in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, India, considered one of the holiest regions of the country. The area is characterized by forests of trees such as the mango, neem, and peepal, as well as the great Yamuna River. The common dress for women is the traditional sari, which is made from six meters of cloth wrapped and tucked to form a skirt and shawl. Men and women also wear a casual loose-style pant and tunics. Hindi is the official language of the state, but English, Urdu, and other dialects are also spoken.

Ancient Custom

Arranged marriage has been a common custom in India, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Mexico, and Eastern Europe for centuries. Modern "love marriages" are increasingly being accepted in most regions. However, the adherence to the arranged marriage custom remains strong. Despite the strength of this marriage custom, some legislation exists to discourage the practice of dowry-giving and to promote the rights of women regarding their own inheritance.

City of Widows

Vrindavan is considered by many Hindus to be the holiest city in India because of its many temples to Lord Krishna. It is also home to thousands of Indian widows, many of whom are abandoned by their families or travel there to live a pious life after the death of their husbands. The temples in the city offer food and money (the equivalent of a few pennies) to widows who chant to Lord Krishna during the day, but the destitute widows have no shelter at night. Since 1984, the Indian Widows Project and similar non-profit organizations have brought humanitarian aid through capital campaigns in industrialized nations, such as the United States, England, Holland, and the Netherlands. However, the population of widows in the city still reaches the thousands.

Vocabulary Word Map

Synonyms

Antonyms

WORD

Definition in your own words

Used in a sentence

SAMPLE

away from the widows' home. Mr. Das fires Mala after he discovers her stealing. Koly misses Raji greatly. When Raji writes and describes the new embroidery room he built for Koly, her doubts about marriage disappear. Mr. Das arranges for Koly to work from her new home, and he gives her a sari for her dowry. The monsoons come, Raji's crops are doing well, and Koly is finally happy.

Vocabulary

modesty (165)
 treacherous (166)
 fertile (167)
 chided (173)
 corrugated (174)
 smirk (176)

Discussion Questions

1. How is Raji different from anyone Koly has ever known? *(Raji is successful and self-sufficient, unlike Hari, who depended on his parents and Koly. Raji has been preparing land to give to Koly rather than expecting a dowry from her. He does not classify her as an unlucky widow. He finds value in Koly and doesn't hold traditional ideas about love and marriage.)*
2. Why is Koly hesitant to marry Raji even though she has been wishing for his return? *(Responses will vary. Her experience in marriage and as a widow left her unhappy and confined for many years. The thought of returning to a life of difficult and endless housework reminds her of Sass. She has found independence and doesn't want to lose it. She thinks, "...would I have to give up my friends? My work" [p. 173]?)*
3. What does Maa Kamala mean when she tells Koly and Tanu, "You are women now..." (p. 173)? *(Maa Kamala has given the girls a new label. They were first girls labeled as widows and forgotten by society, but now they are self-sufficient women. When Koly married Hari, her father commented that she looked like a woman in the special dress, but she was only a girl. Now, she has survived oppression and struggled to earn a living. She is more mature than the girl her father saw. Tanu has also evolved in the widows' home. Maa Kamala knows it's time for Koly and Tanu to be on their own and take care of themselves.)*
4. How does Koly experience true compromise? What type of compromises has she made in the past? *(Raji is happy to have Koly join him in the village as his wife, but he understands the value of her embroidery and friends. He builds a special room for her in his house for her embroidery, and Mr. Das permits her to work from the village. In the past, she sacrificed and changed for others, but others did not sacrifice or change for her.)*
5. Discuss the symbolism of the monsoons in this chapter and throughout the book. *(During the previous monsoon, Hari had recently died, and Koly was adjusting to her new life under Sass' control. This monsoon symbolizes all of Koly's and Raji's worries being washed away and a new life emerging for them together.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. **Writing:** Have students write an essay about the symbolism of Koly's fourth quilt.
2. **Comparison:** Have students create a list of predictions or labels people applied to Koly. Have them create another list showing how Koly proved each one wrong.
3. **Brainstorming/Drawing:** Ask students why they think Whelan named the book *Homeless Bird*. Have students consider what other titles would be appropriate for this book. Then, have each student create a new cover for the book by folding a piece of paper (8.5" x 11") in half. On the front, write a new title for the book and draw some of the symbols they recall from the book.