

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

Killing Mr. Griffin

Lois Duncan

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KILLING MR. GRIFFIN

by
Lois Duncan

Teacher Guide

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Note

The Laurel-Leaf/Dell paperback edition of the book was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions.

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 your class.

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Table of Contents

Summary	1
Introductory Activities	2
Nineteen Chapters.....	8
Chapters contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions, Supplementary Activities, Predictions	
Post Reading Questions.....	29
Post Reading Activities	30

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot,
suspense, foreshadowing,
cliffhanger

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms,
analogies

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, inference,
comparison/contrast

Writing

Descriptive, diary, news
story, letter, comparison/
contrast

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
Reader's Theatre, role play

Chapters 11-12 pp. 126-147

Vocabulary:

fortress 129 striding 129 eviate 130
retrospect 143 stolid 144

Vocabulary Activity:

In each set of words below, underline the one word that does not belong. Then write a sentence explaining why it does not fit with the others. (The most obvious answer is given, but any well-defended answer would be accepted.)

1. fortress, castle, tent, bomb shelter, ocean; (The other words are all protected areas.)
2. striding, soaring, floating, swarming; (*striding*; *Striding* describes fast walking while the other three words describe motion above land through the air.)
3. stolid, unemotional, unfeeling, exuberant (insular); (The other three words are synonyms.)
4. alligate, improve, reduce, worsen (*worsen*); (The other three words are synonyms.)
5. retrospect, flashback, preview, memory (*preview*); (All the other words have to do with looking back at the past.)

Discussion Questions

1. Susan thinks, "If they [her family] had any idea what sort of person I really am, they would never want anything to do with me again." Do you think she is right? How do you think her family will react when they find out about her involvement in the death?
2. Why does Susan tell the police that Mr. Griffin seemed nervous? (*Mark has instructed her to lead them to believe that Mr. Griffin had a girlfriend.*)
3. Why does Jeff argue with Betsy while Mark digs the grave? (*When Betsy acts jealous of Mark's attention to Susan, Jeff suspects Betsy's interest in Mark.*)
4. Why does David leave a jacket in the grave? (*He doesn't like the idea of soil on Mr. Griffin's face.*)

- How does Mark act during the burial? (*excited, elated*)
- Why does David get into Mr. Griffin's car? (*As he says a prayer for the teacher, he wants some sort of communion with the man.*)
- Why does Mark want Betsy to drive Mr. Griffin's car to the airport? (*He doesn't want the car found near the crime site, and he figures that nobody will expect a girl to be driving Mr. Griffin's car.*)
- How do you think the police officer knows Betsy? (*It's the same one, it later turns out, who picked Betsy the night Mr. Griffin died.*)

Prediction

Do you think the policeman who greets Betsy at the airport will enter the story again?

Writing Activity:

Describe a time when you, like Susan—wished you could wake up and discover that some major occurrence in your life was actually only a nightmare.

Chapters 3-4 pp. 102-171

Vocabulary:

disconcerted 152 deconsecration 158 laboriously 159
exasperated 160 contritely 168 skeptically 179

Vocabulary Activities:

Word analogies are like equations in which the words in the first pair have the same relationship with each other as the words in the second pair. For example, HARD is to SOFT as HOT is to COLD. In both pairs of words, the second word is the opposite. Choose the correct word from the vocabulary list to complete the analogies below.

- APOLOGETICALLY is to _____ (*contritely*) as SORROW is to SADNESS
- _____ (*skeptically*) is to BELIEVER as AMICABLY is to ENEMY
- _____ (*laboriously*) is to EFFORTLESSLY as EFFORTLESSLY is to EASE

2. Characterization: The characters in the story vary in terms of how “good” or “bad” they are. Also, some are more “weak” than others. Place each of the characters (Susan, David, his grandmother, his mother, Mark, Jeff, Betsy, Mr. Griffin, and Mrs. Griffin) where you think he or she belongs in the grid below. Compare your finished grids with classmates and share your reasons for making the placements you did.

	very powerful	powerful	neither	weak	very weak
very bad					
bad					
neutral					
good					
very good					

Writing:

3. Write the newspaper article about Mr. Griffin’s death which appeared the day after Mark sets fire to his house.
4. Assume the identity of Susan and write an apology letter to Mr. Griffin’s wife. Write all the things that Susan is unable to say when Mrs. Griffin first visits, after the birth of her son.
5. Write an essay in which you compare the two characters in the novel who seem to be most like one another, and contrast the two characters who seem most different from one another.