



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Missing May

Cynthia Rylant



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

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Cynthia Rylant

## 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

Brainstorming, research

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/  
contrast

### Vocabulary

Compound words, words in  
context

### Writing

Narrative, poetry, descriptive

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interviewing

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story  
elements

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## Summary

May and Ob visit relatives in Ohio, and bring six-year-old Summer home to West Virginia with them, to share their lives and their love. Six years later, May dies and leaves behind two people no longer feeling strong and sure. Summer searches for a way to help Ob's broken heart mend, for she fears that he, too, will surely die. However, the only person able to interest Ob in anything at all is a picture-collecting boy named Cletus, who finds a picture of just the person who might help them after Ob feels May's spirit around him. The trio sets off on a search for some kind of a message from May, and in so doing, Ob comes to realize that "people don't ever leave us for good."

## About the Author

Cynthia Rylant was born June 6, 1954 in Hopewell, Virginia. She has one son, Nathaniel. She attended Morris Harvey College (now the University of Charleston), B.A. 1975; Marshall University, M.A. 1976; Kent State University, M.L.S. 1982. She has been a writer since 1978. Prior to that, she was a part-time English instructor at several universities. She was the children's librarian at the Akron Public Library in 1983.

About living with her grandparents from ages 4 to 8, Rylant has said, "I grew up in West Virginia and what happened to me there deeply affects what I write. My grandparents possessed a quiet dignity, and kept their emotions tight to themselves. You had to learn the intimations of things to know what was going on. They lived life with strength, great calm, a real sense of what it means to be devoted to and responsible for other people. The tone of my work reflects the way they spoke, the simplicity of their language, and, I hope, the depth of their own hearts."

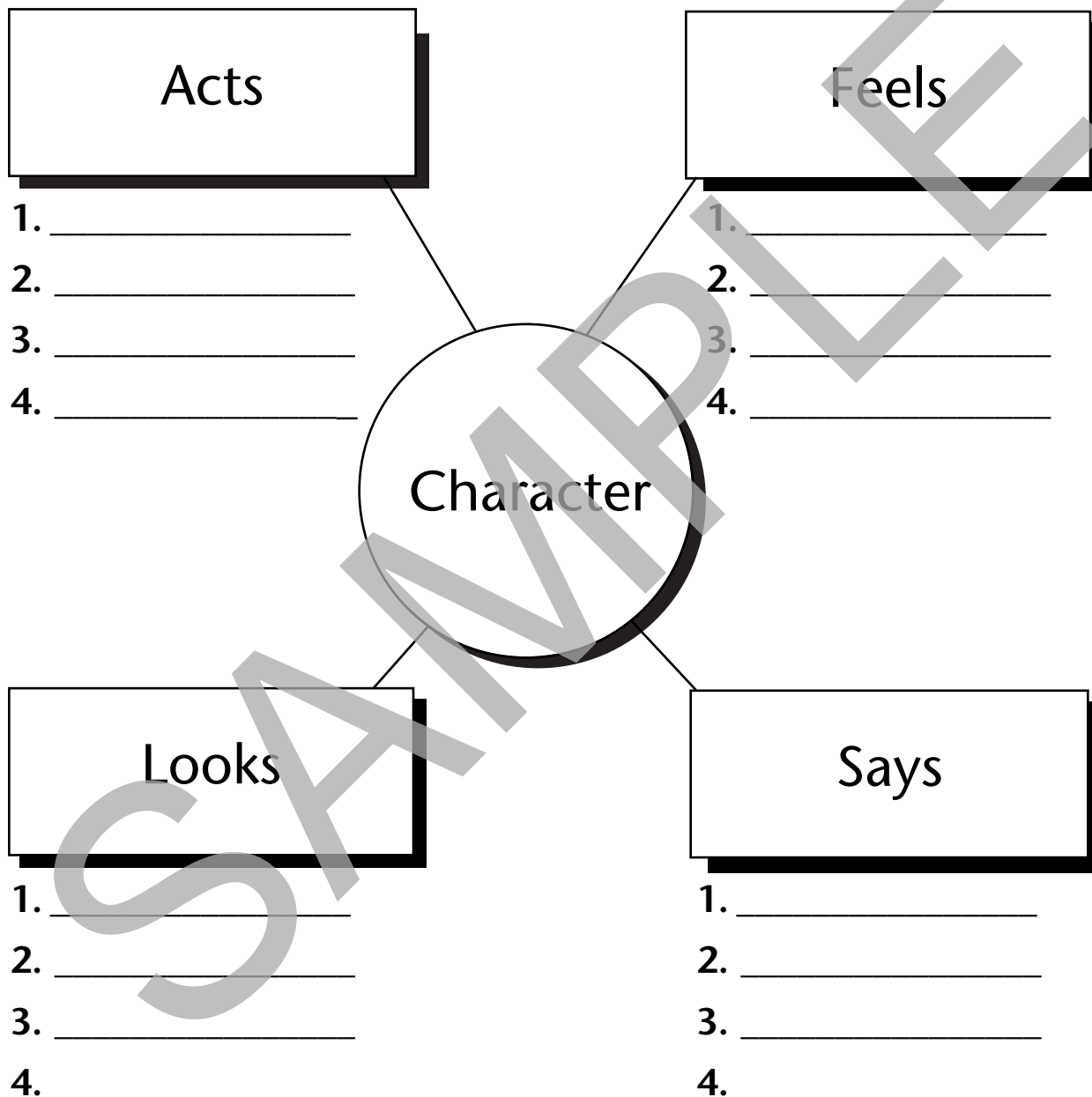
From ages 8 to 18 she lived with her mother in Beaver. "My mother was a constant puzzle to me and to everyone else and provided me later on with great stories for my books. I didn't know I was a writer. I always felt inferior to friends who wrote poetry and short stories." Rylant went on to college and found that she was good at reading and understanding what she read. "Two things happened when I was about twenty-two. I read bonafide children's literature for the first time, and I read stories by James Agee. I realized that in Agee's voice was something of my own. So one night I sat down and wrote *When I Was Young In The Mountains*."

"I come from people who worked very, very hard and whose lives were never simple nor easy. In my books I try to touch on how hard life can be sometimes, but always, always show that for everything we lose, we will get something back. I'd like to be known as one of the great writers of children's books."

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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.



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## Part One—"Still as Night"

### Chapter One—Pages 3-8

#### Vocabulary

braid 4	recognize 4	thunk 5	cockeyed 5
hoisted 5	whirligigs 6		

#### Vocabulary Activity

Use a vocabulary word to complete each sentence.

1. May liked to have Ob \_\_\_\_\_ her hair. (*braid*)
2. Ob liked to make \_\_\_\_\_ for May. (*whirligigs*)
3. Summer could \_\_\_\_\_ the love that May and Ob had for her. (*recognize*)
4. The pan fell to the ground with a \_\_\_\_\_. (*thunk*)
5. The trailer seemed to be placed \_\_\_\_\_ on the ground. (*cockeyed*)
6. Ob \_\_\_\_\_ Summer up to the door. (*hoisted*)

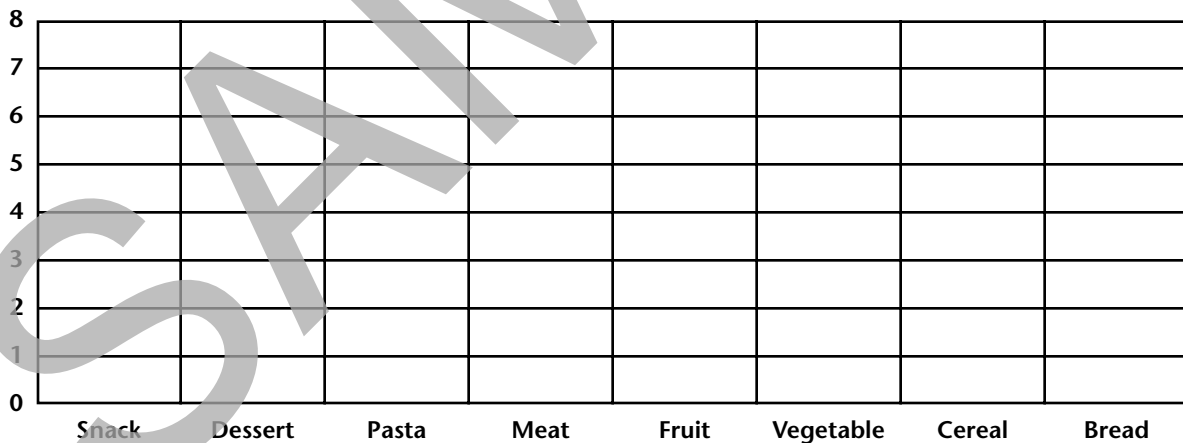
#### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. How does Summer know that she was loved by her mother before her mother died? (*Page 4, \*Summer knows that she was loved by her mother because she can recognize the love shown by others. Summer feels that she would not be able to recognize love unless she had experienced it herself. "...she must have held me longer than any other mother might, so I'd have enough love in me to know what love was when I saw it or felt it again."*) (\*See Bibliography, Brazelton and Klaus, for information regarding bonding, and Buscaglia for learning about love.)
2. Summer refers to the first night with Ob and May, on pages 5-8, "as close to paradise as I may ever come to in my life." What makes her feel like that? (*Ob and May make plans to turn their place into a house just meant for a child.*) What is it that Ob and May plan for Summer, and what do they already have that makes her feel special? (*They have whirligigs of Fire and Dreams and glistening Coke bottles and chocolate milk cartons and other goodies. They plan a swing for the yard.*) Why do you think that these things mean so much to Summer? Do you think that you would feel like Summer does, or would you feel differently in the same situation? Why? (See Post-reading Activity #2.)
3. When she was living with relatives in Ohio, Summer felt that "eating was never a joy of any kind. Every house I had ever lived in was so particular about its food, and especially when the food involved me." (*page 7*) She felt like she was, "Caged and begging." Because of this, do you think that Summer would be a large or a small child? How do you think that you would feel if you were treated in the same way?

4. What does May tell Summer about the food in the trailer? (Pages 7-8, May tells Summer that she may have anything that she wants to eat. If they don't have it, Ob will go to the store to get it for her. May tells Summer, on page 7, "We want you to eat, honey.") What one thing would you especially like to find to eat on a shelf or in the refrigerator? Make a record of the responses. (See Post-reading Activity #3.)
5. How does the last paragraph of the chapter make you feel? (page 8) "Whirligigs of Fire and Dreams, glistening Coke bottles and chocolate milk cartons to greet me. I was six years old and I had come home."

### Post-reading Activities

1. Look at a map of West Virginia. Locate Deep Water, in Fayette County, on the map. If you were going to plan a trip by car to Ohio, what routes would you take to get there? (We are not told the exact location of the visit that was made by May and Ob. Go to Huntington, West Virginia, and then choose a location for your destination in Ohio that is not too far inland from the border of West Virginia.)
2. When inside the trailer, May turns on the fan overhead, then the whirligigs move. Summer describes her reaction on page 7. "I felt like a magical little girl, a chosen little girl, like Alice who has fallen into Wonderland." Think of a time when you have seen something that has made you react in a similar manner. (lights on a Christmas tree, a night view from an airplane, carnival rides, etc.) Use art media of your choice to express the feeling shared by you and Summer. Title your work, and put it on display.
3. Using the responses of the foods most wished for in the cupboard or refrigerator, put the foods into categories, and graph the results.



4. Start character attribute webs for Summer, May and Ob. Add to them as the story continues. (See pages 9-10 of this guide.)
5. Make arrangements with the Industrial Arts teacher, so that the students may be able to make whirligigs during this time. If not available, seek out volunteers to help you in this endeavor. (See Bibliography, Bridgewater and Schoonmaker.)