



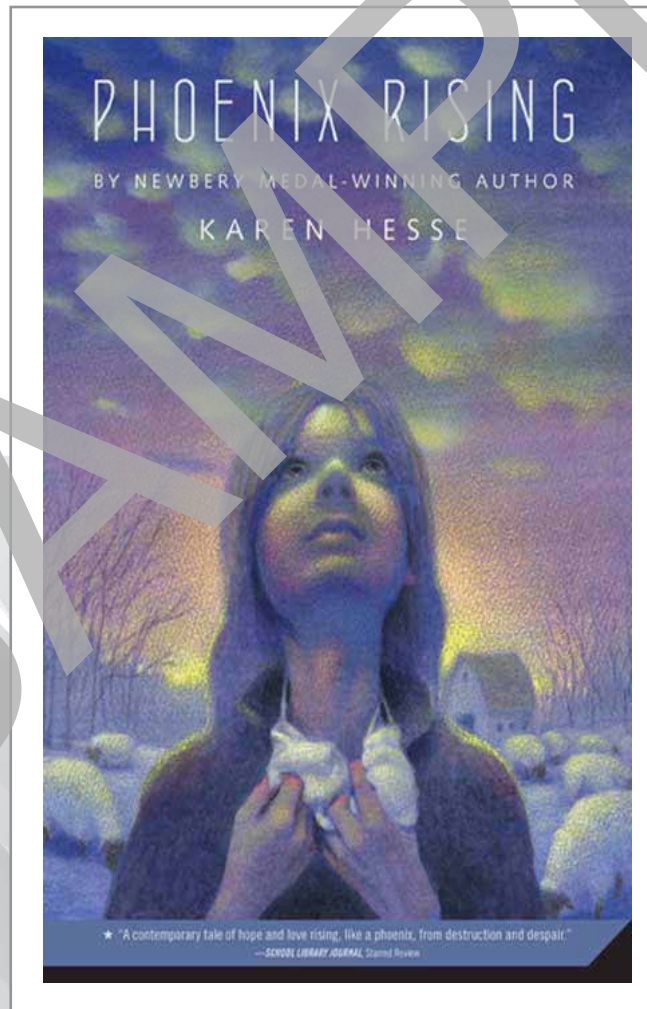
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Phoenix Rising

Karen Hesse



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Phoenix Rising

Karen Hesse

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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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, identifying attributes, compare/contrast, pros/cons, research, analyzing details, drawing conclusions

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, summarizing, cause and effect, inference, main idea

Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, plot development, foreshadowing, point of view, mood, irony, figurative language, dialogue, symbolism, conflict, sarcasm

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, public service announcement

Writing

Eulogy, freewriting, lists, narrative essay, newspaper story, research, direct quotes, letters, journal/diary, haiku poetry

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms, root words, words in context, multiple-meaning words, prefixes/suffixes

Across the Curriculum

Agriculture—raising sheep; Social Studies—maps, Anne Frank, World War II, the Holocaust; Science—nuclear power production, cheese-making process, meteor showers, windchill factor; Art—drawing, bulletin board, poster, collage; Health—effects of radiation; Drama

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: present-day, farm in Vermont

Point of View: first person

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature

Themes: death, family, hope, survival, tolerance

Tone: somber

Date of First Publication: 1994

Summary

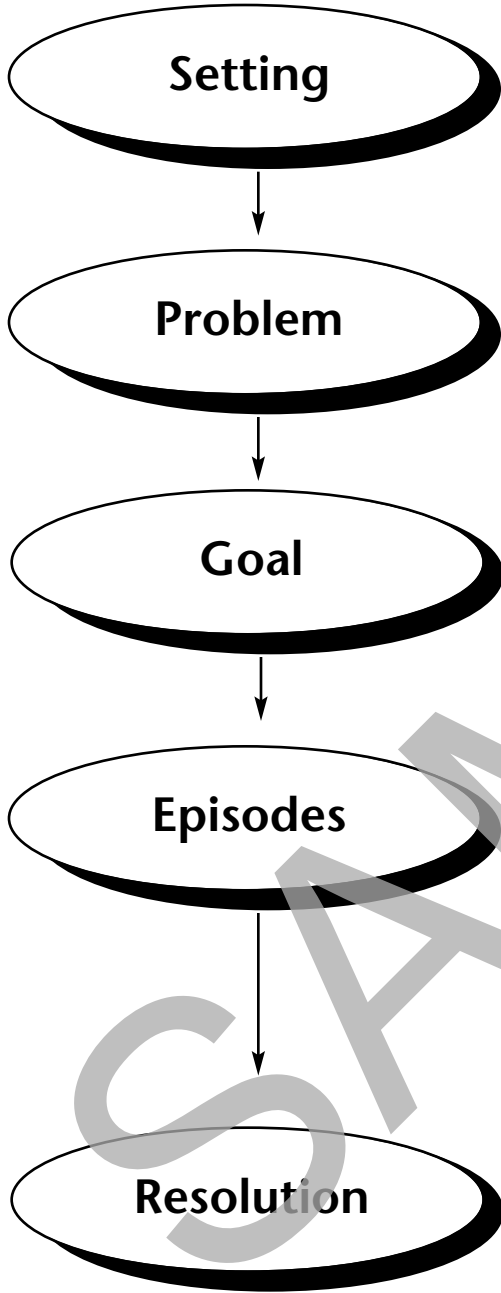
The novel relates the devastating effects of a nuclear power plant disaster on the land and the people who live near it from both a physical and an emotional point of view. Told from the viewpoint of 13-year-old Nyle Sumner who has witnessed the death of her grandfather and mother, it is a coming-of-age story set against tragedy. After a nuclear explosion in nearby Cookshire, Nyle and her grandmother take in radiation-exposed evacuees who lived near the plant. Nyle refuses to become close to 15-year-old Ezra Trent because she is sure that he will die. After all, he is staying in the “dying room,” the back bedroom where two members of her family have died. Nyle also struggles with keeping the secret of the Trents’ stay from her best friend Muncie Harris, who is overly cautious about radiation exposure, and her bully neighbor Ripley Powers. Regardless of how she initially feels about having the evacuees stay in their home, Nyle eventually begins to care for Ezra as he gradually improves after the accident. However, the radiation speeds the spread of cancer in Ezra’s body, and he dies of leukemia. Nyle decides to try to prevent this tragedy from happening to others.

About the Author

Karen Hesse was born August 29, 1952, in Baltimore, Maryland. She began college as a theater major at Towson State College, but later changed her major when she transferred to the University of Maryland. She graduated with a B.A. in English and a double minor in psychology and anthropology. She first thought of becoming a writer in the fifth grade when her teacher praised her writing, but it wasn’t until 30 years later that she published her first novel, *Wish on a Unicorn*. Her 1997 novel, *Out of the Dust*, a historical novel written in free verse, won the 1998 Newbery Medal and the Scott O’Dell Award. *Phoenix Rising*, published in 1994, was inspired by a documentary of the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl and its effects on the land and people surrounding the accident area. Hesse considered the ramifications of a nuclear disaster at a nuclear energy power plant located within 20 miles of her Vermont home. *Phoenix Rising* was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Notable Children’s Book, and a *School Library Journal* Best Book.

Karen Hesse lives with her husband, Randy, and their two daughters in Williamsville, Vermont. Other works by the author include: *Letters from Rifka* (1992), *Lavender* (1993), *Poppy’s Chair* (1993), *Sable* (1994), *A Time of Angels* (1995), *The Music of Dolphins* (1996), *Just Juice* (1998), *Come On, Rain!* (1999), *A Light in the Storm: The Civil War Diary of Amelia Martin* (1999), *Stowaway* (2000), *Witness* (2001), *Aleutian Sparrow* (2003), and *The Cats in Krasinski Square* (2004).

Story Map



Characters _____

Time and Place _____

Problem _____

Goal _____

Beginning → Development → Outcome

Resolution _____

- Has Nyle really treated Muncie the way all the other kids treat her, as Muncie claims? *(Answers will vary. pp. 147–148)*
- What does Gran mean when she says that the music concert will “be good for everyone” (p. 151)? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: She could mean that it will be good for the Trents to be seen in public and be around people again, and that it will be good for people to be around the Trents and to find out that the radiation will not affect them.)*
- Why isn’t Nyle pleased about Ezra getting better, even though she has been hoping he will do so? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: She doesn’t want him to leave, and she is afraid he won’t like her as much when he doesn’t need her. pp. 153–154)*

Supplementary Activities

- Creative Writing:** Write a 60-second public service announcement for radio or television that focuses on safety precautions that should be taken at or around a nuclear power plant.
- Freewriting:** Acting as Muncie, record your feelings in your journal following the events in Chapter 23.
- Art:** Draw a caricature of Nyle that indicates her feelings after talking to Muncie about Ezra.

Chapters Twenty-five–Twenty-nine, pp. 156–182

Ezra starts school with Nyle and seems to fit in with the other students. One night, as they are doing their homework together, Nyle writes about how Anne Frank has made an impact on her life, while Ezra writes how Nyle has impacted his. Ripley Powers sees Nyle and Ezra together, and he taunts them. Ezra lunges at Ripley, but Ripley easily overtakes Ezra and beats him up. Ripley begins to choke Nyle, and Muncie comes to her rescue. They take Ezra to Nyle’s house, where Gran and Mrs. Trent take him to the hospital. Nyle learns that Ezra is dying of leukemia, a cancer caused by radiation poisoning. Nyle sees Ezra one last time before he dies. She decides to make sure a nuclear accident does not happen anywhere again.

Vocabulary

rehashed (157)
 coronary (157)
 procrastinating (158)
 script (159)
 prejudice (159)
 deciphering (159)
 linoleum (160)
 pummeled (165)
 wardrobe (168)
 sepia (168)
 welts (170)
 muck (170)
 slogged (172)
 kindling (173)
 luminous (174)
 emitted (174)
 treacherous (174)
 constricted (177)
 wisps (180)
 craggy (180)
 nuzzled (182)

Discussion Questions

- Why do Ezra and Nyle sit at the back of the bus? *(possibly to keep from calling attention to themselves so they will not have to tell anyone that he is one of the evacuees, p. 156)*
- Why does Ezra also write a letter even though it is not his assignment? *(He says he wants to keep Nyle company, but he actually has things he wants to say to Nyle that he cannot say to her face. pp. 159, 161–162)*
- Why does Nyle choose Anne Frank to write about? *(The qualities she admires in Anne are the same qualities she admires in Ezra. p. 160)*
- Why does Nyle’s letter to Anne Frank bother Ezra? *(Answers will vary. pp. 160–161)*

5. Why does Ripley attack Nyle and Ezra? (*Suggestions: He's a mean bully; he doesn't think before he speaks; he's uneducated; he is jealous of Ezra; he's angry because his dog Tyrus was killed by radiation poisoning. pp. 163–166*)
6. Give examples from this section that prove Muncie is a true friend to Nyle. (*She stands up to Ripley and hits him with her backpack. She helps Nyle take Ezra to the house even if it means getting blood on her. She comes to stay after dark with Nyle. She listens while Nyle tells the story in the tractor shed. She comes back to Nyle's house after Ezra dies. pp. 167, 173–174, 182*)
7. Why is it significant that Gran has kept the doll and picture all these years? (*Nyle needs to be reminded of her past and confront it, just as she must confront Ezra's death and move on. pp. 168–169*)
8. Why is the cancer ward in the hospital full? (*Many people now have cancer caused by the exposure to radiation poisoning. p. 177*)
9. Explain Nyle's statement: "Everything had changed since then, and yet nothing had changed" (p. 178). (*She is referring to her previous fear that Ezra was going to die because he stayed in the back bedroom where her mother and Gramps had died. Now Ezra would still die, even though he is not in the back bedroom.*)
10. Do you think Ezra liked Nyle as more than a friend? (*Answers will vary.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Science: Research the effects of nuclear contamination on people. Is the novel accurate in having Ezra suffer from leukemia as a result of radiation poisoning? Create a chart revealing your findings.
2. Mood: Using your mood color cards, choose the color that best fits the mood you felt when you finished the novel. Write a paragraph explaining why you chose that color.