



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Racing the Sun

Paul Pitts

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

# Racing the Sun

Paul Pitts

## 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

Identifying attributes, compare/contrast, pros/cons, brainstorming, identifying stereotypes, research

### Comprehension

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

### Writing

Character journal, peace treaty, chant, ode, sensory memories, personal writing, eulogy

### Vocabulary

Target words, context clues, root/base words, synonym, antonym, word maps

### Listening/Speaking

Dramatizing, interviewing, discussion, music, storytelling

### Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, plot development, foreshadowing, humor

### Across the Curriculum

Social studies—maps, research; Science—health issues, tumbler gardens; Art—drawing, design and color, sandpainting, drawing, personal shields, jewelry making; Music—chants

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## Summary of *Racing the Sun*

*Racing the Sun* tells the story of Brandon Rogers and his Navajo grandfather who comes to live with him in the city. Although Brandon's father has adopted the "White man's" way of life, Grandpa believes Brandon should know about the Navajo traditions and his heritage. Grandpa begins by teaching Brandon the importance of "racing the sun" each morning and the proper way to plant and tend a garden. Brandon learns many things about the Navajo way of life and beliefs and begins to recognize some of the things his father has given up in his search for success. When Grandpa insists that he must return to his home in Little Water, Brandon understands the request and takes a bold step to help Grandpa. In Little Water, Brandon learns some of his most important lessons about treasuring family and family stories. When Brandon's father comes to take Grandpa and his son home, he, too, learns an important lesson about acceptance and love.

### About the Author

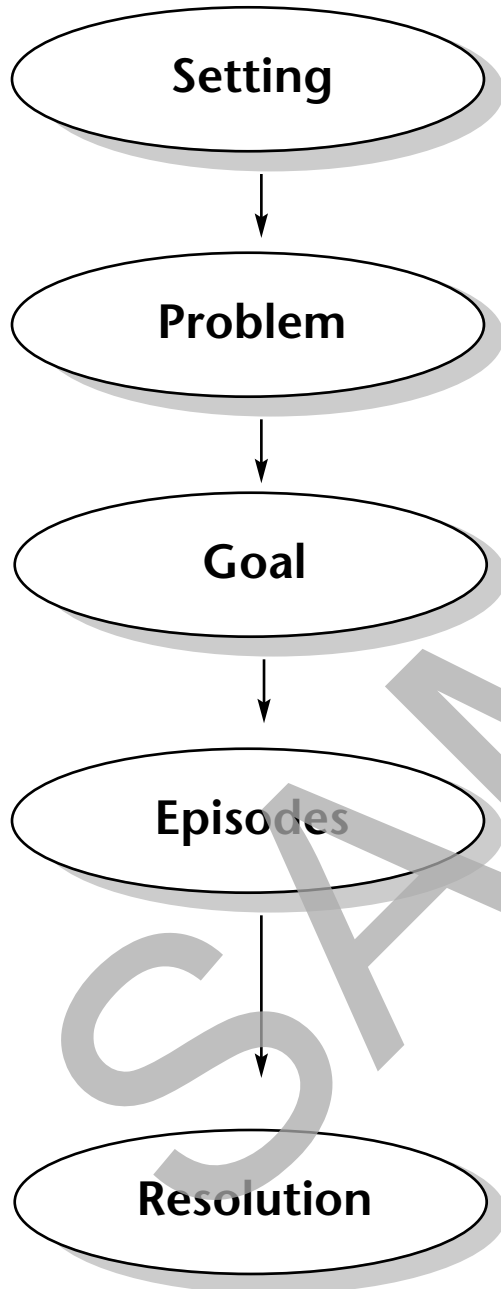
Paul Pitts, an elementary school teacher, lives with his family on the Navajo Indian Reservation in southeastern Utah. He belongs to the Utah Writing Project and has published several articles and stories in magazines. *Racing the Sun* is Mr. Pitts' first novel.

### Introductory Activities

1. **Previewing the book:** Have students look at the cover of the book and answer the journalist's questions about what they see: who? what? where? when? why? Based on their answers, students predict what the book will be about.
2. Given the following clues, students write a paragraph predicting what they think will happen in the story.  
son          father          grandfather          tradition          culture          home
3. **Character Journal:** List the main characters from *Racing the Sun* and have students choose one. As they read the book, students write regular journal entries from that character's point of view. Journal entries should reflect on the events of the story. At various points in their reading, have students share their journal entries with classmates.
4. Create an **attribute web** (see next page) with students for each of the following ideas: family, tradition, heritage, home, friendship. Focus on one word at a time. Begin by writing the word in the center of a large piece of paper. Ask students to quickly tell what each word brings to mind. Encourage students to elaborate on particular ideas.

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## Story Map



Characters \_\_\_\_\_

Time and Place \_\_\_\_\_

Problem \_\_\_\_\_

Goal \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning → Development → Outcome

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1—pages 1-11

### Vocabulary

customary (1)	enthusiasm (1)	academic (1)	algebra (1)
ecological (2)	resonant (2)	underachiever (3)	exclusive (3)
ingenuity (3)	reciprocal (3)	bizarre (3)	cultural (4)
convenient (4)	hogan (4)	guttural (4)	interpreting (5)
intrigue (5)	rumblings (5)	mellow (5)	berserk (6)
enticingly (6)	affluent (6)	glamour (6)	straddles (7)
crisis (7)	equation (7)	solitary (7)	confinement (7)
upheaval (8)	sulk (9)	methodical (10)	marvel (10)
spontaneous (10)	intuitive (10)		

### Discussion Questions

1. Why are the boys talking about algebra as they walk home from school? (*Brandon wants Ham to do half the assignment so they do not have to do as much work.*)
2. From what you know so far, how would you describe Cochise (Brandon) and Ham (David)? (*Answers will vary. Students should note the boys' close friendship and their sense of humor.*)
3. What is UGA? How did it begin? (*UGA is the Underachieving Goof-offs of America. Brandon organized the club after he heard his mother saying that all his teachers said he was an underachiever.*)
4. What is an underachiever? (*Answers will vary. Students should realize that an underachiever is someone who does not live up to his/her potential.*)
5. Why do Ham and Cochise like one another? (*Brandon and Ham accept one another for who they are.*)
6. How does Cochise's father feel about his Navajo culture? (*He has rejected the Navajo way of life to pursue the "American dream."*) Why? (*Answers will vary.*) Does his mother feel the same way about the Navajo culture? (*She seems more connected to the Navajo way of life. However, she has no family, so she has no connection to the reservation.*) Why or why not? (*Answers will vary.*)
7. What does Cochise think his parents are arguing about? (*Aunt Ethel's letter asking them to take in Grandpa.*) Why? (*Brandon's father would not want Grandpa living with them.*)
8. Why does Ham tell Cochise to make a list? (*So he can decide whether he wants Grandpa to come live with his family.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Geography:** Have students locate Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah on a map of the United States. If the map does not show the Navajo reservation, have students use clues from the text to approximate its location. Students will find a map on the Navajo Nation's official website: [www.navajo.org](http://www.navajo.org). Students can also find a map in the *Atlas of the North American Indian* by Carl Waldman (Facts on File, New York, 1985).
2. **Research:** Have students consult reference books for answers to the following questions: What is a reservation? When did the first reservations in the United States begin? Why? Where were they? How many reservations are in the United States today? Where are they?

3. **Critical Thinking:** Have students create a T-chart that lists the positive and negative things about having an elderly relative live with their family.

Having an Elderly Relative Live with You	
Positive	Negative

4. **Literary Analysis/Character:** Have students begin a character attribute web (see pages 8-10 of this guide) for each boy. Students should continue to add information to the webs as they read the following chapters.
5. **Literary Analysis/Story Maps:** Have students begin a story map (see page 11 of this guide) to use as they read the story. As they read the book, they should continue to add new information about the characters, setting, problems, and events of the story.

## Chapter 2—pages 13-22

### Vocabulary

digestive (13)	efficiency (13)	psychological (13)	homestead (14)
channel (14)	manipulate (14)	mastermind (14)	disrupt (14)
chanting (15)	mumbo jumbo (15)	enlightened (15)	broad-mindedness (15)
infringes (15)	anticipating (16)	scrunched (17)	isolation (17)
mammoth (17)	inconvenience (17)	compact (17)	bulky (17)
prolong (18)	solemnly (18)	eliminate (19)	stalling (20)
miscellaneous (20)	wincing (20)	attaining (21)	dissatisfied (21)
civilization (22)	traditional (22)	lured (22)	negotiate (22)
halfhearted (22)			

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do Brandon's parents talk only to him during dinner time? (*They are angry with each other and don't want to talk.*)
2. Why do Brandon's parents disagree about whether his grandfather should live with them? (*Brandon's father focuses only on the problems that his father will cause. Brandon's mother believes that Grandpa should be with family. She also seems more accepting of Grandpa's traditions and customs.*)
3. Do you think Brandon's father is embarrassed by Grandpa? (*Answers will vary.*) Why or why not? (*Answers will vary.*)
4. How does Brandon's family prepare for his grandfather? (*Brandon and his mother set up the bunk bed and make room for Grandpa's things.*)