



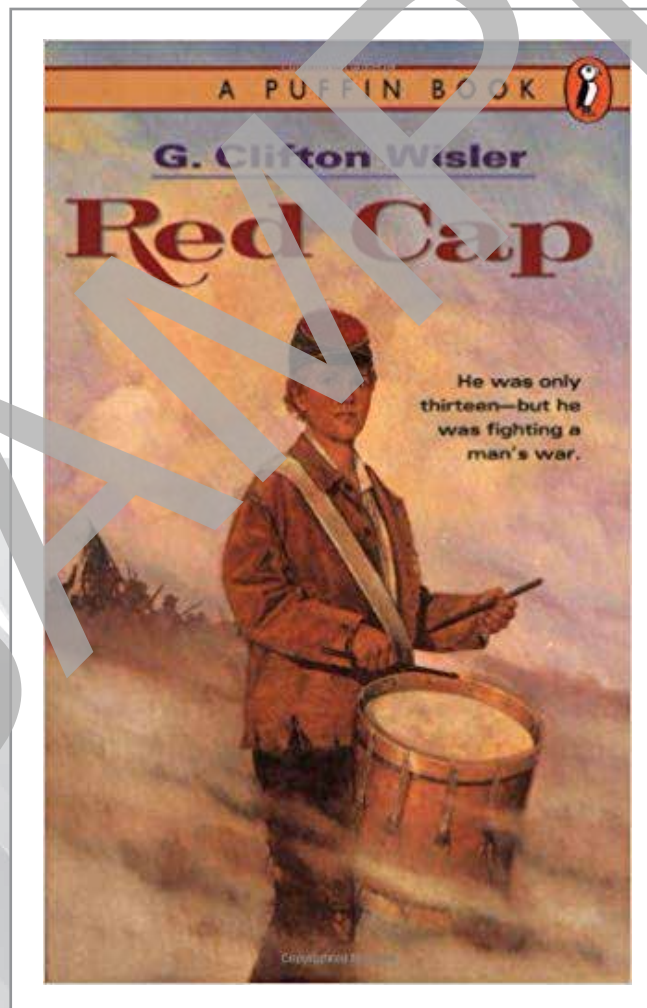
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Red Cap

G. Clifton Wisler



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

# Red Cap

G. Clifton Wisler

## 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

Research, visualization,  
summarizing

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
comparison/contrast

### Writing

Poetry, narrative, letters

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, word mapping

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion

### Literary Elements

Story mapping,  
characterization

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## Summary of *Red Cap*

This book is a fictionalized version of the imprisonment of Ransom J. Powell in Andersonville Prison during the Civil War.

Although small for his thirteen years, R.J. Powell lies about his age and joins the Union Army as a drummer. Paired up with Danny Hays, a seasoned drummer not much older than himself, R.J. learns the drum calls and camp protocol. Sharing the mess with young soldiers, R.J. earns the respect and friendship of each one. At first, fever and diarrhea take the lives of more soldiers of the Tenth West Virginia Volunteer Infantry than the battlefield. The horror of battle adds to the sorrow of R.J. when Danny is killed. R.J. and nineteen other members of Company I are captured and sent to Camp Sumter, a Confederate prison called Andersonville by the inmates. The great suffering endured by the prisoners, and the brutal treatment by the guards and officials is shared by all, including R.J. and the men of Company I. It is only by great sacrifice on the part of the others that R.J. is the lone survivor of the twenty men of Company I in the Andersonville Prison.

(Some topics of study that one might consider while reading this novel: the Civil War prisons, drummer boys of the Civil War, The Battle of Atlanta, Stonewall Jackson, U.S. Grant, children in war, slavery...)

## About the Author

G(ary) Clifton Wisler was born May 15, 1950, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He attended Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, B.F.A. 1972; M.A. 1974. Although Wisler was born in Oklahoma, he grew up in Dallas, Texas. In 1961, Wisler joined a Boy Scout troop and became acquainted with the earth that his grandfather had told him about. Wisler also discovered his storytelling abilities at that time, entertaining others with old stories and his own tales. While a senior in high school, Wisler took some journalism classes and wrote articles and editorials for the school paper. This was his first public recognition as a writer. While in college, the campus newspaper afforded Wisler more experience and headed him toward the life of a newsman. However, his experience with children at a Boy Scout summer camp led him to a teaching career and a graduate degree. It was while teaching at a middle school in Garland, Texas that Wisler tried his hand at writing a novel. *My Brother, The Wind* was published in 1979. His many stories come from the campfire tales of his past, historical events, and his imagination.

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## Story Map

Characters \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

Problem \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Goal \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Beginning → Development → Outcome

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

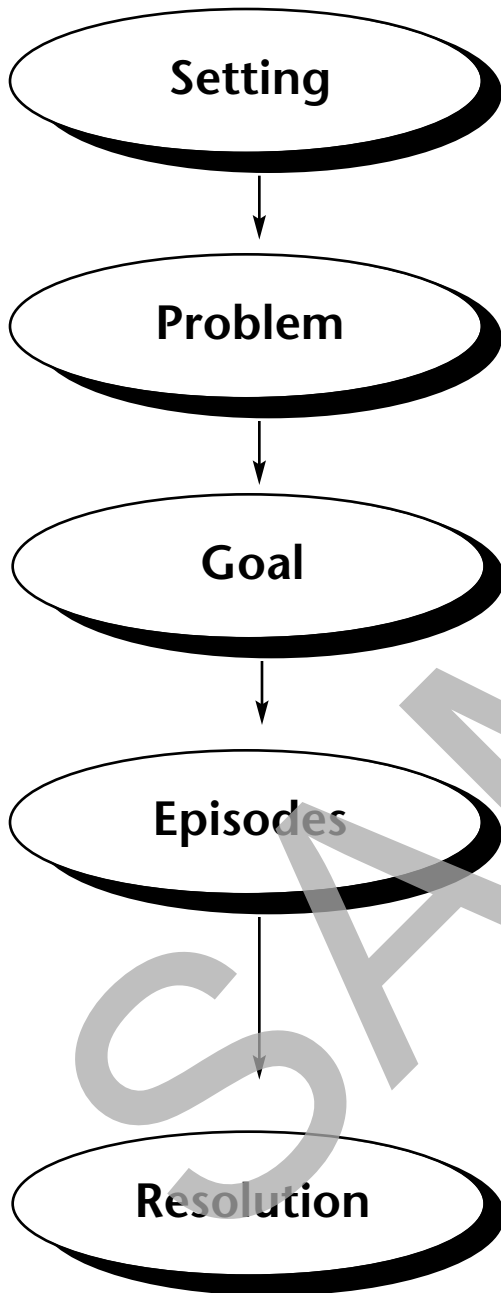
\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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## Chapter-by-Chapter

### Chapter 1: Pages 1-13

#### Chapter Summary

It is mid-April, 1861, in Frostburg, Maryland. Fort Sumter in South Carolina is taken by force, and the Civil War begins. The people in this small community are divided in their feelings and long-time friends soon become enemies on the battlefield.

#### Vocabulary

frail 1  
confederacy 2  
kepi 12

game (find him) 1  
perplexing 2

fortitude 1  
retribution 7

chastise 1  
recompense 7

#### Vocabulary Activity

Match the vocabulary word with a synonym.

Synonym	Vocabulary Word
pay	_____ (recompense)
courage	_____ (fortitude)
confusing	_____ (perplexing)
delicate	_____ (frail)
organization	_____ (confederacy)
daring	_____ (game)
repayment	_____ (retribution)
scold	_____ (chastise)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Mr. Havers tells the class that some South Carolinians have taken Fort Sumter by a force of arms, and that there will be a war. What does Ransom find perplexing about Mr. Havers' announcement concerning war? (Page 2, Ransom has a hard time understanding that what Carolinians do in Charleston has a bearing on what happens in Maryland.)
2. What happens after school to show Ransom how beliefs may dictate actions? (Page 4, Ransom's friends, Enos and Ollie, come to blows at the pond. Ollie believes that it is not right to own people, and Enos believes that President Lincoln has no business telling people what they can and cannot do with slaves.) What does Ransom conclude? (Page 4, "If we took to blows over things, being the best of friends since any of us could walk, then older folks sure weren't above firing off cannons and marching regiments against each other.") Does this reasoning make sense to you? Why or why not? Discuss.
3. What does Mr. Powell reply when Ransom asks, "You figured out what it's [the war] all about, Pa?" (Page 6, Mr. Powell tells Ransom that he really doesn't know; there are many versions as to why people are at war. He also tells Ransom, "I've never held with slaveholding, Ranse. But it does

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*seem like those people ought to make the choice themselves.”) Do you think this conversation is representative of those had by the general population of Frostburg? Discuss.*

4. Not wanting to be “forever staying behind,” what does Ransom decide to do about going to war? (Pages 12-13, Ransom talks to a recruiting captain from the Union Army and decides to join the regiment in Piedmont, Virginia. He packs a few things and leaves home while the rest of the family sleeps.) What is your opinion of Ransom’s decision? Discuss. See Post-reading Activity #3.

### Post-reading Activities

1. Start a character attribute web for Ransom J. Powell. Add to the web as the story continues. (See pages 9-10 of this guide.) [Characterization is the way an author lets the reader know what the characters are like. In direct characterization, the author describes the character directly (frail, small). In indirect characterization, the author provides clues about the character through thoughts, speech and actions.]
2. Do some research. Find out more about Stonewall Jackson and the battle of Bull Run. Why was Jackson given the name of “Stonewall”?
3. List the viewpoints of Ransom and his parents, as well as others in the story, with regard to joining a regiment during the Civil War. Which viewpoint do you think you might be persuaded by if you were in Ransom’s place?

Reasons For Staying Home

Reasons For Joining A Regiment

4. Start a story map. (See page 8 of this guide.)
5. Will Ransom get to Piedmont on time? Will the captain find out Ransom’s real age? What do you think might happen next? Make a prediction.

## Chapter 2: Pages 14-21

### Chapter Summary

Ransom arrives in Piedmont and enlists as a drummer in the Tenth Regiment, Virginia Unionists. R.J., the name Ransom prefers as a soldier, is helped by Danny Hays, the established drummer of the regiment. Wearing clothes much too large for him, R.J. is assigned to a mess with five other soldiers. In charge of the cooking pot, R.J. follows Danny’s advice to “fix” his messmates for teasing him by adding pepper to the evening stew. After a spanking administered to R.J.’s backside by the corporal, R.J. and the others end the day on friendly terms.