



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Red Kayak

Priscilla Cummings



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Red Kayak

Priscilla Cummings

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

Comprehension

Creative thinking,
identifying attributes,
inferring, predicting,
problem-solving,
supporting judgments

Literary Elements

Story mapping, conflict,
characterization, setting,
theme, symbols, author's
purpose, point of view,
oxymorons

Vocabulary

Word maps, definitions,
root words, target words,
synonyms

Writing

Creative writing, personal
narrative, dialogue, lyrics,
journalism, poetry

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interviewing,
oral presentation, debate

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research,
compare/contrast,
fact/opinion, analysis,
evaluation, cause/effect

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—history, maps
and geography, relationships,
Navy SEALs, sociology,
juvenile justice system;
Science—butterfly garden,
blue crabs, Chesapeake Bay
ecosystem, littoral drift,
storms, endangered species,
time line; Health—CPR,
organ donation, hypothermia,
psychology, kayak safety;
Math—graphs; Art—design,
illustration; Music—
composition

Genre: contemporary fiction

Setting: present-day; Bailey's Wharf, Maryland—a small town on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake River

Point of View: first person

Themes: friendship, integrity, justice, loyalty, peer pressure, death, choices and consequences, communication, balance of nature

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. nature, person vs. society

Style: narrative

Tone: conversational, candid

Date of First Publication: 2004

Summary

Eighth-graders Brady, J.T., and Digger are best friends with fond memories of growing up along the Chesapeake Bay, but things are changing. Developers and over-fishing are affecting the bay and the livelihoods of watermen like Brady's father. The boys, especially Digger, are unhappy about losing their old fishing and swimming holes when illness forces Digger's grandfather to sell his farm to the wealthy DiAngelo family. Then three-year-old Ben DiAngelo dies in a kayaking accident—an accident Brady feels he might have been able to prevent. Working for Mrs. DiAngelo helps Brady overcome his guilt and grief until he discovers evidence that J.T. and Digger had tampered with the DiAngelos' kayak. Brady struggles between loyalty to his friends and telling the truth. Eventually, Brady reaches deep inside himself to do the right thing, and J.T. and Digger are charged with their crime. The boys learn about values, the meaning of friendship, and taking responsibility for their actions.

About the Author

Born in 1951, Priscilla Cummings grew up on a dairy farm in Massachusetts. Though she loved caring for animals, her favorite pastime was reading books and writing stories about animals. She considered becoming a teacher before choosing a writing career. After graduating from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in English literature, Cummings worked as a newspaper reporter and, later, as a magazine writer and editor. She moved to Maryland where her fascination with blue crabs resulted in her first book, *Chadwick the Crab*, published in 1986. Cummings wrote more picture books featuring Chadwick and other animals in the Chesapeake Bay and published her first novel, *Autumn Journey*, in 1997.

Her awards include the 1980 UPI's Journalist of the Year for Virginia for articles about women in prison and the 2001 International Literacy Award from Metro-Washington Association for Childhood Education for her "Chadwick" books. *Red Kayak* has received numerous awards, including the 2006 American Library Association (ALA) Best Books for Young Adults, the 2007 Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Award, and the 2007 Oklahoma Sequoyah Award. Cummings lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with her husband, writer John Frece, two children, and a variety of animals.

Chapters One–Four

Brady thinks back to six months ago when he, J.T., and Digger watched their inexperienced neighbor kayak downriver in unsafe conditions. Brady wants to yell out a warning, but Digger, angry with the neighbor for purchasing his grandfather's property, thinks the man deserves whatever happens, and J.T. silently sides with Digger. Later, Brady is taken from school to help search for the missing neighbor—only it isn't Mr. DiAngelo but his wife and three-year-old son, Ben, who are missing. When rescuers find Mrs. DiAngelo barely alive downriver, Brady doubts he'll find Ben up one of the many creeks off the river, the area he's been assigned to search. Then Tilly, Brady's dog, barks toward a yellow lifejacket that is partially hidden by the ruins of an old dock.

Vocabulary

corrode
jimmies
strewn
ketch
oxymorons
chortled
exposure
callous
marina
encroaching
skiff
transom
riprap
phragmites
inlets

Discussion Questions

1. How does the author create suspense in Chapter One? Is this an effective way to begin a novel? (*The author hints about an upsetting event but, instead of learning what happened, readers learn the effect the event has on Brady; Answers will vary. Suggestion: yes, because readers are drawn into the story by wanting to find out what happened*)
2. What pieces of information do you learn about Brady in Chapter One? Which do you think is most important? (*Brady thinks what happened may be his fault or that he could have done things differently. He has lost his best friends as well as his neighbors. Brady isn't working because he can't bring himself to go back out on the water. His family's advice isn't helping, and something happened to Brady's sister; Answers will vary.*)
3. Discuss reasons for the scarcity of crabs in the area. Do you think the government's solution is fair? Will it solve the problem? (*pollution, development, and over-fishing; Answers will vary but should include a discussion about the effects laws have on families dependent upon fishing, as well as the importance of maintaining the balance of nature as development progresses.*)
4. Digger and J.T. exchange a look that Brady doesn't understand, and J.T. starts laughing. What can you infer from this information? (*Answers will vary but should include that Digger and J.T. share a secret about the kayak.*)
5. Brady is comfortable telling Digger not to swear and telling both J.T. and Digger not to play with equipment in the ambulance. So why doesn't Brady go against J.T. and Digger and call out a warning to Mr. DiAngelo on his own? What would you have done? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Brady doesn't want to further agitate Digger by continuing to talk about the DiAngelos, Brady is embarrassed about the comment Digger has just made concerning Brady's being "in love" with Mrs. DiAngelo, or Brady shares Digger's resentment toward Mr. DiAngelo for buying Digger's grandfather's property and kicking them off of it just a few days ago.*)

6. Brady understands Digger’s anger toward the DiAngelos for buying his grandfather’s property and kicking them off of it the day they were caught smoking, yet he likes the DiAngelos and realizes Mr. DiAngelo was justified in his actions. Analyze the argument between the two sides, and give rational reasons for each viewpoint. *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: Mr. DiAngelo owns the property and has every legal right to ask trespassers to leave, especially the three boys, who posed a hazard to the property by smoking. The boys feel justified in their actions because they grew up on this farm—which was, until recently, Digger’s grandfather’s property and their “stomping grounds.” They feel they have a right to be on their familiar territory.)*
7. Why is Brady pulled from school to search for Mrs. DiAngelo and Ben? Do you think knowing Brady had seen the kayak earlier influences Carl’s or Brady’s father’s decisions to include Brady in the rescue search? *(Brady is pulled from school because he has a boat and can aid the rescue team by searching the small creeks and inlets off the river. This will free other rescuers to search downriver, the area where the DiAngelos most likely will be found; Answers will vary but could include that Brady’s father and Carl obviously trust Brady’s skills in a boat and consider him to be a responsible person. The fact that he saw the red kayak earlier is of no consequence.)*
8. How did Brady’s mom react to Amanda’s death? Do you think what she did was a good or bad thing? Why? *(She couldn’t sleep in the house so she left Brady and his father and stayed at Brady’s grandmother’s house for almost half a year; Answers will vary but should include how Mom’s decision might have affected Brady. Discussion could cover the different reactions people have to death and whether a parent’s responsibility to his/her child outweighs the parent’s own personal needs.)*
9. What two memories does Brady recall while searching for Ben? What do these memories tell you about Brady? *(He remembers spending time with Carl, other paramedics, and firefighters and falling through ice as an eight-year-old; Answers will vary but should include that Brady knows emergency procedures and understands the urgency of life-and-death situations.)*
10. **Prediction:** Why isn’t Ben downriver with Mrs. DiAngelo?
11. **Prediction:** Will Brady save Ben?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Begin Character Webs (see page 27 of this guide) for Brady, J.T., and Digger. Add information about each character as you read the book.
2. **Science:** Chart the life cycle of the Chesapeake Bay’s blue crab.
3. **Figurative Language:** Within a set period of time determined by your teacher, create a list of oxymorons, including your own examples as well as some found in printed material. The student with the most examples wins.
4. **Sociology:** The philosophy of the LEGO® Group is “learning through play.” Research how play contributes to a child’s education and development, both learning and social. Then design an educational play schedule for young children.
5. **Vocational:** Research an occupation as a paramedic. Learn what training and other job qualifications are necessary and about working conditions. Consider your strengths and weaknesses. Write an essay explaining whether a career as a paramedic would be a good choice for you.

Story Map

Directions: Complete the story map below for *Red Kayak*.

