



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Same Stuff as Stars

Katherine Patterson



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Same Stuff as Stars

Katherine Patterson

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

Compare/contrast, research, critical thinking, decision making

Comprehension

Predicting, summarizing, cause/effect, inference, main idea, details, sequencing, drawing conclusions

Vocabulary

Context clues, definitions, parts of speech

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, dramatizing

Writing

Journal, poetry, creative writing

Literary Analysis

Characterization, grammar, story maps, figurative language

Across the Curriculum

Social studies, astronomy, art, drama

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: present-day rural Vermont

Point of View: third-person limited

Themes: family, responsibility, education, acceptance, bravery, poverty, astronomy, kindness, love, growing up

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

Tone: serious

Date of First Publication: 2002

Summary

Abandoned by their mother, 11-year-old Angel and her seven-year-old brother, Bernie, live with their great-grandmother. With their father in jail and great-grandmother frail and unable to care for the children, Angel finds herself the head of the household and living in abject poverty. Adjusting to a new school, taking care of her brother and an elderly woman, and coming to terms with her situation in life is difficult. Angel meets the “star man,” who teaches her the wonders of the constellations and gives her hope. Her inspiration gives her the strength to carry on—that is, until her disjointed situation becomes even worse. Bernie is taken away, and the star man disappears, maybe for good. In this story of one girl’s bravery, compassion, and quest to achieve her dreams, Angel must use every resource she has to overcome and save her family.

About the Author

Katherine Paterson was born in China and moved 18 times before she was 18 years old. Her travels provide the settings for many of her books. Her novels include *Bridge to Terabithia*, which won the Newbery Medal in 1978, and *Jacob Have I Loved*, which won the Newbery Medal in 1981. She also wrote *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, a Newbery Honor Book. Additionally, Ms. Paterson has received the National Book Award for Children’s Literature twice and the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1998. In 2000, Katherine Paterson was named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress. Paterson and her husband live in Vermont. They have four children and seven grandchildren.

Characters

Angel Morgan: protagonist; 11-year-old girl who takes care of her brother and great-grandmother

Bernie Morgan: Angel’s seven-year-old brother

Grandma: Angel and Bernie’s great-grandmother

Verna: Angel and Bernie’s mother who abandons them on Morgan Farm

The star man/“Santy Claus”/Ray: Angel and Bernie’s great-uncle who teaches Angel about the stars and constellations

Wayne Morgan: the children’s imprisoned father

2. **Figurative Language:** Discuss figurative language. Examine the following examples, and read them in the context of the novel. Then write a sentence or two explaining what each one means. **Similes**—“fought like a wildcat” (p. 186); “veins standing up like blue ribbons under the papery skin” (p. 187); “ran like the devil was at her heels” (p. 222); “her brain was like a little car on a giant amusement park ride” (p. 224); **Personification**—“a car coughing up the dirt road” (p. 223); **Metaphor**—grin: ghost (p. 191)
3. **Literature/Research:** Find a copy of *Starry Messenger* by Peter Sis or other books about Galileo Galilei. Write a short, one-page report about the life of Galileo, the famed astronomer, writer, and philosopher.
4. **Characterization:** Complete the Emotions Chart on page 25 of this guide. Use the chart to pinpoint moments in the novel when each character experiences frustration, anger, fear, humiliation, relief, and triumph.

Chapters 19–21

Grandma tells Angel about her son, Ray. She has considered him dead because he came back from the war a changed man and they had a falling out. Now she anguishes over the “waste of manhood” in her family. All the men either became addicts or ended up in jail. Angel tells her Grandma that Ray is a good man and that she should be proud of her son. Angel visits Ray in the hospital and talks to him before he has his unsuccessful operation. He tries to comfort her and says he will return to stardust. Angel, Grandma, and Miss Liza attend Ray’s funeral. A social worker comes to take Angel from Grandma, but Angel and Miss Liza talk her out of it. Bernie calls from a hospital where he and Verna have been taken after a car accident. When Angel and Grandma go visit, Bernie seems to be in good spirits. Angel confronts Verna and insists that her mother shape up and take responsibility for the family. The novel ends on a note of hope that the family will somehow survive.

Vocabulary

government
cagey
kin
hearse
mourners
gash
glorious
capable
citizen
liable
undecipherable
frantic
recommendation
lank
elegance

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Grandma say Ray is dead? (*Upon his return from Vietnam, Ray was never the same. He wasn’t her son; the war had scarred him.*)
2. Why doesn’t Grandma like Miss Liza? (*She is jealous because Ray used to go to Miss Liza instead of his own mother when he needed help.*)
3. Describe the scene as Angel visits Ray in the hospital. (*He looks terrible and has tubes and wires sticking out of him. He is in the Intensive Care Unit, which is sterile, white, and cold. Ray is sure that he is dying.*)
4. The title, *The Same Stuff as Stars*, reemerges as Ray talks to Angel. How does he say the stars are relevant to his situation? (*He reminds Angel that they are made of the same elements as stars and says he is turning “back to stardust” [p. 236].*)
5. Why does Angel think, “The star man should have been buried at night with all his stars dancing in attendance” (p. 239)? (*The star man has taught Angel much about stars and had such passion for them. Angel feels Ray should have been buried when the stars would be there for him.*)

6. While gazing at the night sky, what promise does Angel make to the star man? (*She promises that she will never forget him or the things he taught her.*)
7. How can Angel be like Polaris? (*She can be strong and stable when others around her are unstable and the world seems dark. She can be a constant.*)
8. Who is Mrs. Morris, and what does she want? (*Mrs. Morris is a social worker who has come to check on Angel's welfare. She feels she needs to take Angel from Grandma, but Angel convinces her to go speak to Miss Liza about how well they are getting by.*)
9. Why do Grandma and Angel go back to the hospital? (*Bernie calls. He and his mother have been in a car accident and are hospitalized.*)
10. As Angel gets off the elevator in the hospital, "dread was weighing down her chest like an iron bar" (p. 257). Why does she feel this way? (*She is afraid of what she will find. She is worried about Bernie. Her mother is in ICU, where Angel last saw Ray before he died.*)
11. What does Angel tell Verna she must do? (*She must get well, come home, and start being a responsible adult.*)
12. What do the children wish for on a star? (*Bernie wishes his mother "won't ever go away again" [p. 264]. Angel wishes that they will all be happy.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Poetry: Miss Liza reads "Take Something Like a Star" by Robert Frost. Find a copy of the poem, and take turns reading portions of it aloud. Discuss the poem, and analyze what it means.
2. Writing: At the end of this novel, a very disjointed and dysfunctional family has hope for a new beginning. Discuss what makes a family work. Then write about what makes Angel's family work using specific details from the novel.
3. Foreshadowing: Review the Clue Log you completed while reading the novel. Write a one-page essay about events foreshadowed that did not come true and what happened instead.
4. Writing: Imagine you are in Angel's shoes when she confronts Verna in the ICU. On a separate sheet of paper, write what you would say or do. How does it differ from what Angel said or did?

Word Map

Directions: In the word map below, complete each box for the assigned vocabulary word.

Synonyms

Antonyms

WORD

Definition in your own words

Used in a sentence
