

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

Silent to the Bone

E. L. Konigsburg

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SILENT TO THE BONE

by
E. L. Konigsburg

Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research, critical thinking, decision-making, creative thinking

Comprehension

Predicting, evaluating decisions, sequencing, summarization

Writing

Letters, essays, reviews, poems, short stories, skits, brochures, journal entries

Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion, acting

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, context clues, antonyms

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, characterization, point of view, symbolism, figurative language, theme, foreshadowing

Across the Curriculum

Art—caricatures, sketch, painting;
Social Studies—legal professions, international travel, family trees;
Health/Science—drunk driving, concussions, smoking dangers

2. **Figurative Language:** Begin recording similes, metaphors, and personification in a figurative language chart. Continue adding to the chart as you read the book. Examples: **Similes**—“Talk was like the vitamins of our friendship...” (p. 7); “...it was as if [all those words] had gotten crushed in a Cuisinart” (p. 27)
3. **Health:** Branwell’s mother was killed in a car accident involving a drunk driver. Make a poster warning about the dangers of drunk driving. Include at least two facts or statistics on your public awareness message.

Chapters 4–7

Branwell communicates with Connor by using cards, and the first card Branwell signals is “Margaret”—Connor’s older half-sister who was Branwell’s babysitter for many years. He also directs Connor to talk to his grand parents, The Ancestors. From Margaret, Connor learns how Branwell must have felt when his father remarried a woman named Tina. From The Ancestors, he discovers why his mother was not present during Nikli’s birth. Connor attends Branwell’s meeting with his grand parents and their lawyer. “Bran” signals for Connor to investigate a particular spot on the map. Connor seeks Margaret’s help with the tape and begins to unravel the truth.

Vocabulary

residential
 canon
 converted
 psychology
 mented
 cultivating
 emigrated
 deposit
 remainder
 semblance
 ambitious
 competent
 accustomed
 evangelist
 monopoly
 deliberately
 minor
 deposition

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Branwell choose Margaret as Connor’s title? What does Connor learn about Branwell as a result? *(Branwell chooses Margaret—Connor’s half-sister and former babysitter. Margaret believes that Branwell chose her because she was present when Branwell returned from summer vacation with his grandparents to find his father deeply in love with Tina. Branwell felt left out, and Margaret understood because she saw her own father in love with another woman. She felt like an outsider and suspects Branwell must have felt the same after having his father to himself for so long.)*
2. What was different about Branwell’s and Margaret’s experiences with their fathers? Is your opinion regarding Branwell’s guilt changing? Explain. *(When Margaret’s father remarried, she still had her mother. When Branwell’s father found Tina, Branwell was completely left out. Answers will vary.)*
3. How do you explain Branwell’s card choice? What is Branwell’s goal in his communication with Connor? *(Branwell is choosing Margaret because she was involved in his father’s new marriage and the birth of his half-sister. Bran is revealing personal experience to help Connor understand the feelings now paralyzed inside him.)*
4. What is your impression of Mr. and Mrs. Branwell, also known as The Ancestors? *(Answers will vary. They are set in their ways and have a sense of superiority about them. They seem unaware of their stereotypical and prejudiced opinions about people of other races, particularly Tina. They seem concerned that Branwell’s father is marrying an “Oriental.”)*

5. Why did The Ancestors keep Branwell away during his new sister's birth? What do you think Branwell wanted? *(Branwell wanted to cancel or postpone his visit to Florida, but his grandparents insisted upon it. They did not want Branwell home during the arrival of a new baby and of Tina's family. They wanted a distinct separation between their grandson—the son of their own daughter—and the arrival of the new baby, who is not a true part of their—the grandparents'—family. Branwell wanted to see the baby and to call immediately when he got the birth announcement, but his grandparents kept him from doing so.)*
6. Explain how Connor's new relationship with Branwell resembles that of "a boy and his dog" (p. 65). *(Connor is the boy who can communicate with the dog, Branwell, cannot. Branwell needs Connor to be his contact with the outside world and in the way, Connor needs Branwell to need him.)*
7. What does Connor notice that the doctor notices when he attends The Ancestors' meeting with their lawyer and Branwell? Is anything significant about Connor's observation? Explain. *(Connor notices that Branwell clenches his fist and squints his eyes at a particular point in the 911 tape. Answers will vary.)*
8. Why is Connor's heart vital to Bran? *(Connor realizes that his friend could be charged with manslaughter or murder if Nikki dies. If Branwell is truly innocent, Connor must find proof or his friend could be imprisoned.)*
9. Why does Margaret ask Connor about his relationship with Tina and the new baby? What do Margaret and Connor deduce? *(She wants to gauge Branwell's innocence for herself. She may also be helping Connor put together some of the clues he has gathered. The two siblings determine that although Branwell does not like his stepmother, and although he thinks his baby sister is beautiful, his actions may have conveyed his feelings in a way that actions toward Tina and the baby may have been misinterpreted.)*
10. **Prediction:** What will Connor learn from Victoria?

Supplementary Activities

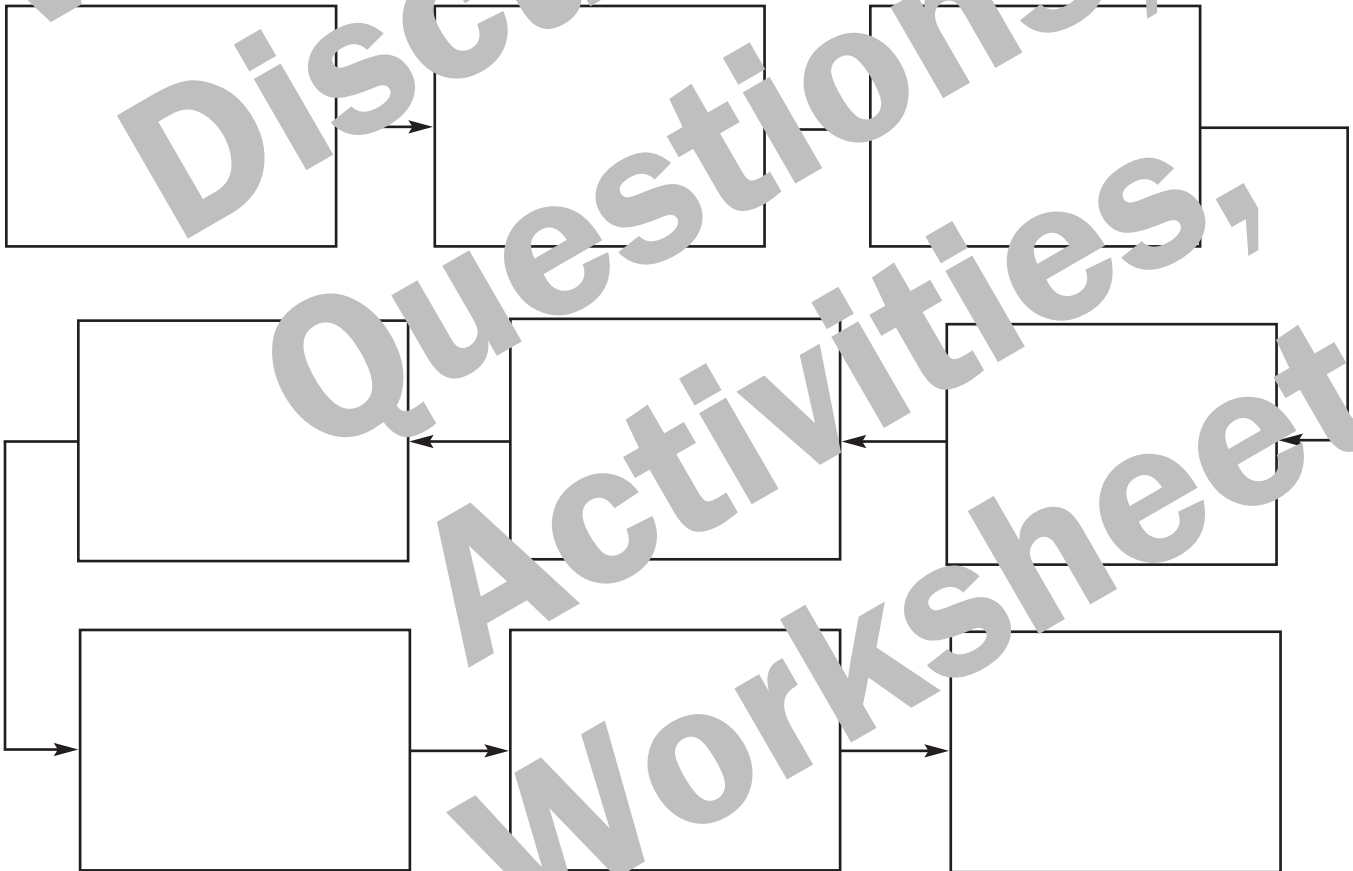
1. **Figurative Language:** Continue adding to your chart. Examples: **Similes**—"welcomed me as if I were a walk" (p. 37); "Whatever he was seeing...made him as lonely as his silence" (p. 52); **relationships**—"...was something like that between a boy and his dog" (p. 65); "voice as calming as a lullaby" (p. 72); "[Asking about Branwell and Tina] was like going to the doctor's office...a pain in your stomach and heart by taking your blood pressure in your arm" (p. 73); **Metaphors**—personal "doctor" for bad memories (p. 45); not "reaching" a weapon (p. 69)
2. **Writing:** Pretend you are Branwell once again with your grandparents while your sister is being born at home. Write a journal entry that tells how you feel and what you are thinking. You may also write about a time in your life when you felt truly "helped" by your circumstances.

Story Map

Title

Setting, Characters, Problem, Solution

Series of Events



Making Decisions

Directions: Choose three to seven possible solutions to the problem you write below.

- (a) State each solution in a short sentence.
- (b) Design three to five "criteria" (questions you can ask to measure how good a particular choice may be).
- (c) Rate the criteria for each solution: 1 = yes; 2 = maybe; 3 = no.

Problem: _____

Solutions ↓	Criteria		
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			