



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Silent to the Bone

E. L. Konigsburg

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Silent to the Bone

E. L. Konigsburg

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!

ISBN 978-1-50204-174-6

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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

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: Epiphany, a middle-sized town in the present day

Point of View: first person

Themes: friendship, acceptance/rejection, honesty/deceit, family, life/death, redemption, justice, shame, fear

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

Tone: conversational, informative

Date of First Publication: 2000

Summary

Thirteen-year-old Branwell Zamborska will not speak after an accident involving his baby sister Nikki. She is hospitalized, and Branwell is accused of intentionally harming her. He is placed in a detention center. Connor Kane, Branwell's best friend, is convinced Branwell is innocent and continues to visit Branwell, improvising ways to communicate. Connor wants desperately to prove Branwell's innocence. The story comes together in layers as Connor pieces together the truth about the accident. Branwell slowly begins to open up and finally speak as Nikki moves gradually toward full recovery in the hospital.

About the Author

Born on February 10, 1930, Elaine Lobl Konigsburg says that she believes she “owe[s] children a good story.” Konigsburg was the second of three sisters and spent much of her childhood in small towns in Pennsylvania. After graduation, she worked to earn money for college and entered Carnegie Mellon University where she studied chemistry and graduated in 1952. She later completed graduate work at the University of Pittsburgh in 1954. Konigsburg became a science teacher.

She married David Konigsburg and left teaching in 1955 when her first child, Paul, was born. A year later she had a daughter, Laurie, and in 1959, a son, Ross, followed. She went back to teaching from 1960–1962 until her husband's work brought the family to New York City. She did not begin writing until all three of her children were in school.

Among her many credits, E. L. Konigsburg holds the honor of being the only author to have two titles on the Newbery list in the same year. In 1968, she won the Newbery Medal for *The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and a Newbery Honor for *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth*. She continued to write, largely based on stories she had heard or things her children experienced. Also a painter, Konigsburg illustrated many of her own stories. In 1997, Konigsburg won a second Newbery Medal for *The View From Saturday*. *Silent to the Bone* was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a *Booklist* Editors' Choice book, a *School Library Journal* Best Book, and an Edgar Allan Poe Award Nominee.

Part of the appeal of a Konigsburg novel is its respectful treatment of children. Konigsburg's works also show realistic characters learning truths about themselves and enjoying their lives. Konigsburg's advice to children is, “Before you can be anything, you have to be yourself. That's the hardest thing to find.”

Chapters 8–11

Connor discovers the au pair’s impact on Branwell. After meeting Vivian, he too is smitten with her. He begins to doubt his friend’s innocence after hearing Vivian’s account of Branwell. Connor talks to Branwell about his time with Vivian, and Bran becomes furious. Connor switches the topic to the 911 call, which Margaret and his father are helping him edit. Margaret explains her relationship with their father to Connor. Connor realizes his power as Branwell’s connection to the outside world and the importance of believing in Branwell’s innocence.

Vocabulary

registrar
tuition
gorge
sincerity
cuff
skein
suspended
submerged
obsessive
hoarse
barrister
diplomatic
accounting
loony
weaning
underlings
intricately
whittle
juvenile
opalescent

Discussion Questions

1. How is the author able to spend so much time educating readers about au pairs and giving details about Vivian’s relationship with the Zamborska family? *(The author uses Connor’s ignorance about au pairs to educate readers. The narrator learns about this type of arrangement as the plot advances.)*
2. What is Connor’s impression of Vivian? of Branwell’s relationship with her? *(Connor noticed Branwell’s fascination with Vivian, who is a young, attractive British girl with an appealing accent. Branwell became fascinated not only with her accent and dialect but also with her—he talked about her a lot and even accepted a nickname she gave him. After school, Branwell spent more time at home than with Connor. On Veterans’ Day, he even lied about being sick to avoid lunch and the movies with Connor. Connor believed Branwell wanted to spend more time with Vivian.)*
3. Why do you think Branwell did not pick Vivian’s name from the word cards when Vivian was actually present at the time of Nikki’s injury? Was Branwell trying to keep Vivian for himself? Explain. *(Answers will vary.)*
4. How does Margaret’s interview with Vivian affect Connor? What does Margaret think of Vivian? What do you think of Vivian and her account of Nikki’s injury? *(Connor is smitten with Vivian. He believes Branwell was fascinated with Nikki since he had noticed Branwell spent more time at home than with him. Everyone is silent when Vivian relays that Branwell interrupted her bath three times. Connor begins to doubt if Branwell is truly innocent as Vivian portrays his behavior as being inappropriate. Margaret does not like Vivian and several times challenges her on the details of her account. She sees how Vivian affects Connor and warns Connor to be careful. Answers will vary. Note that Vivian never actually saw Branwell drop the baby.)*
5. How does Branwell react to Vivian’s account, as told to Connor? Why do you think Bran reacts as he does? Connor wonders what he has triggered. What do you think? *(He shakes his head as though Connor is to be pitied. Then he becomes furious as Connor asks him about walking in on Vivian in the bath three times. Bran overturns a chair when leaving Connor. Answers will vary. Note that it seems Connor has missed something significant, as Branwell tries to speak as if to clarify or correct—but he cannot.)*
6. Why do you think Branwell wants Connor to investigate the tape? What is Branwell hearing that no one else has heard yet? *(Answers will vary.)*

7. How is Connor's investigation affecting the relationship between his sister and his father? *(Margaret does not like her father. She feels he abandoned her and her mother when he remarried. Connor forces the two to communicate regarding the tape he is investigating. Connor's father seems to love his daughter very much, but she is cold and distant and he seems resigned to accept her opinion of him.)*
8. What do you think Branwell is keeping silent about? *(Answers will vary. Note Connor's differentiation between Branwell's silence before and after Nikki's accident—how at first it was a choice and then it became a physical affliction. It is likely that the silence involves Vivian.)*
9. What metaphor does Margaret use to describe her relationship with her father? Explain. *(Margaret describes her father's love as a gift of pure ivory. The ivory was given without warning that it must receive proper maintenance because, if neglected, it will begin to deteriorate. When her father fell in love with his new wife, he left Margaret out of that relationship. Now their love for one another, like a piece of tarnished ivory, is irreparably tainted. Answers will vary.)*
10. Margaret, Connor, and Branwell all had instances in life when they felt left out and hurt. Discuss how the fear of rejection can affect a person. How does acceptance help Bran open up to Connor? *(Answers will vary. People are inclined to protect themselves when they are afraid of rejection. Margaret closes herself off from her father to protect herself from pain. Connor felt isolated when Branwell was spending time with Vivian. If fear of rejection makes people angry, jealous, or protective, then feeling accepted does the opposite; it creates openness and security among people. Connor chooses to accept Branwell as he is and believe his friend is innocent. He hopes that by being a safe person for Branwell, he may help Branwell overcome fear, shame, or insecurity.)*
11. **Prediction:** Do you think Connor will give Vivian the hair grip? If so, how do you think she will respond?

Supplementary Activities

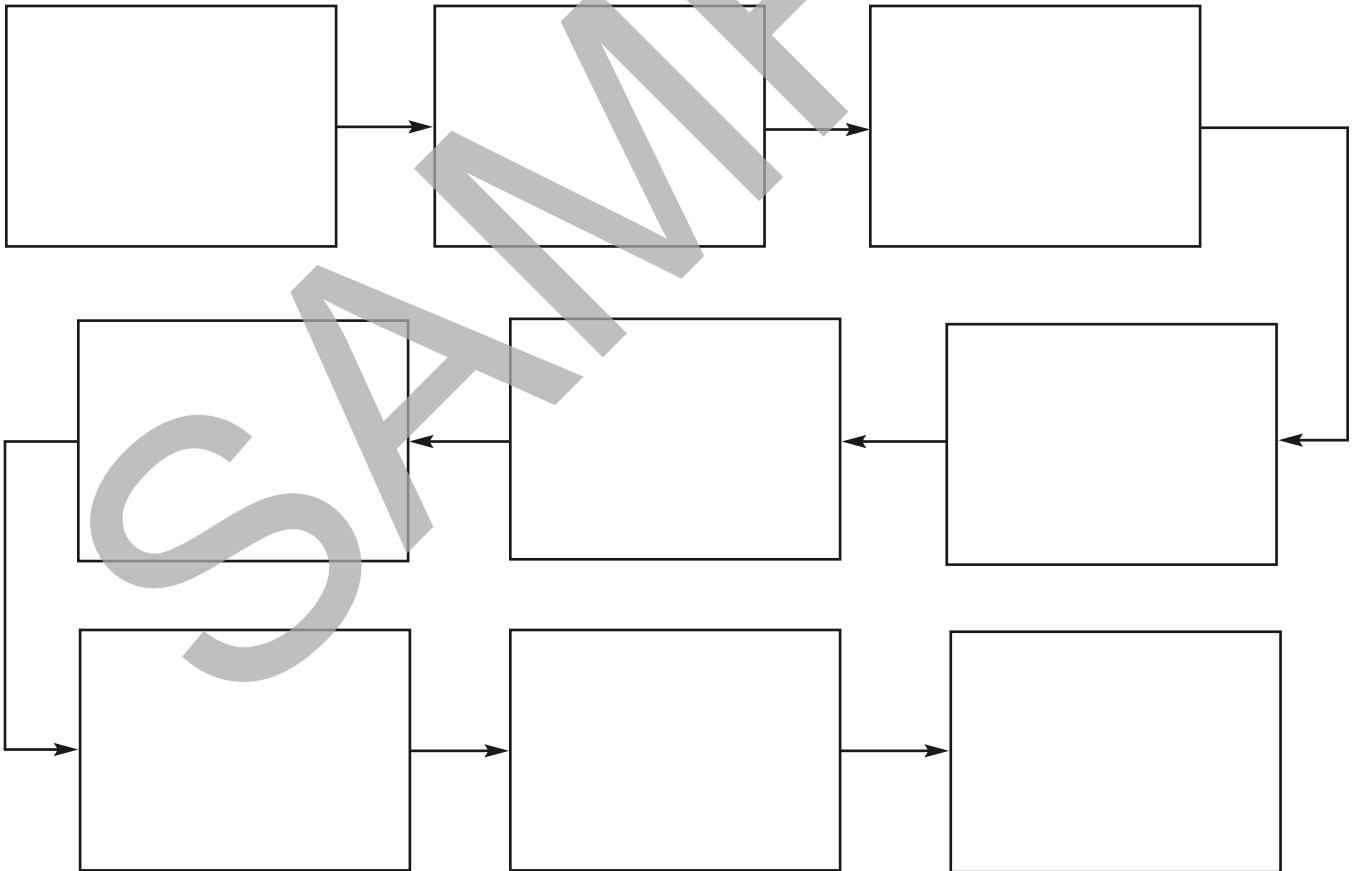
1. **Figurative Language:** Continue adding to your chart. Examples: **Similes**—"blue sweater that looked as soft as a baby blanket" (p. 90); "He...turned as red as his hair..." (p. 97); "pursed her lips as if blowing kisses" (pp. 99–100); "He looked like a frightened puppy" (p. 115); **Metaphors**—Branwell's silence: a whole different species (p. 123); love: a beautiful ivory carving (p. 125)
2. **Writing:** Write a poem that focuses on either silence or fear of rejection.

Story Map

Title

Setting, Characters, Problem, Solution

Series of Events



Character Web

Directions: Complete the character web below by filling in information specific to a character in the novel.

