



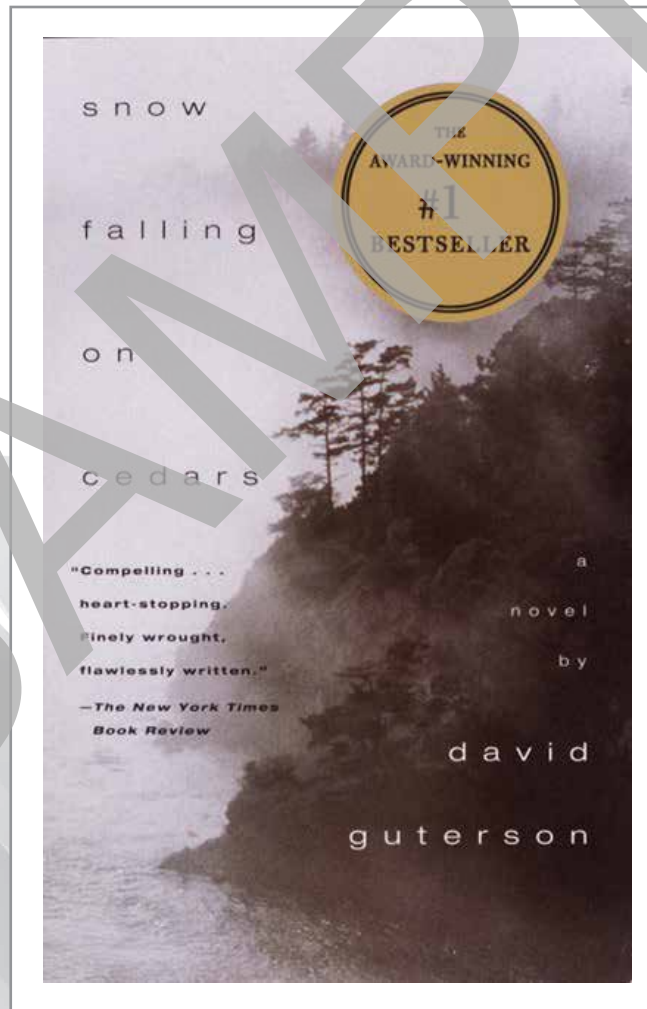
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Snow Falling on Cedars

David Guterson



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Snow Falling on Cedars

David Guterson

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

Brainstorming, research,
evaluating, analyzing details

Comprehension

Cause/effect,
comparison/contrast

Literary Elements

Literary devices defined,
symbolism, characterization,
plot analysis, conflict

Writing

Dialogue, poetry, essay
writing, journal entries

Creative Writing

Script writing, reports,
descriptive writing, adver-
tisements

Vocabulary

Vocabulary words

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, drama, oral
reports

Information about the novel

Point of View: Third person omniscient

Setting: A small fishing community, Amity Harbor, on San Pedro Island (fictional), off the coast of Washington, 1954.

Summary

Two plots run concurrently in *Snow Falling on Cedars*: the trial of Kabuo Miyamoto and the quest by Ishmael Chambers for closure of painful events in his own life and for truth and justice.

As the novel begins, Kabuo Miyamoto, a second-generation Japanese American (Nisei), is on trial for the murder of Carl Heine, a fellow fisherman who drowned under mysterious circumstances. Although his death initially appears to be accidental, circumstantial evidence implicates Miyamoto. The trial, however, is more than a question of one man's guilt or innocence. It is ultimately a tale of the Anglo community's prejudice and fear toward the Japanese Americans who live among them on San Pedro Island.

During the trial proceedings, the story of Ishmael Chambers, the local newspaper reporter, unfolds to reveal his adolescent love for Kabuo's wife, Hatsue, and his unresolved anguish over losing her. The plot interweaves stories of the Japanese Americans who suffered through internment during World War II, including how Heine's mother cheated the Miyamotos out of their family land. Flashbacks reveal the devastating impact of the war on the men who fought. *Snow Falling on Cedars* is a courtroom drama, a war chronicle, an interracial love story, and a lesson in American history.

Themes: Prejudice, racism, love, justice, inner conflict

The Novel

Snow Falling on Cedars was first published by Harcourt Brace in 1994. The novel reached #1 on the *Sunday Times* paperback bestseller list in September 1995 and won the 1995 PEN/Faulkner Award and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award. Guterson stated that it took him about ten years to write the novel: thinking about it for two years, then researching and writing for eight.*

The film version of *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999) stars Ethan Hawke, Youki Kudoh, Rick Yune, Anthony Harrison, and Max Von Sydow. Written by David Guterson, directed by Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall, it is rated PG-13 because of sexual content, war images, and profanity.

About the Author

David Guterson was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1956, and lives on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound with his wife and four children. He received his M.A. degree from the University of Washington. Formerly a high school English teacher, Guterson is the author of a collection of short stories, *The Country Ahead of Us, the Country Behind*, a non-fiction book, *Family Matters: Why Home Schooling Makes Sense*, and his new novel, *East of the Mountains*. He is also a contributing editor to *Harper's* magazine.

His father is a criminal lawyer, and Guterson often observed his father's trials. He credits Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with the success of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, his first novel. He claims that in his book he employs the same basic structure and addresses the same concerns as those in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, his favorite book.*

**Taken from Elisabeth Sherwin's interview with David Guterson, "New Writer Thanks Harper Lee for Leading Way," gizmo@dcn.davis.ca.us.*

Introductory Information and Activities

Initiating Activities

Choose one or both to establish an appropriate mind set for the novel.

1. Distribute Student Activity #1. Have students brainstorm associations with the word PREJUDICE. Using the framework on an overhead transparency, guide students as they cluster their ideas into categories. Discuss.
2. Ask students if they have ever encountered prejudice. Direct them to write a journal entry detailing their experience(s). This is intended to be personal and will not be shared unless a student wishes to do so.

Section-by-Section Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Activities

Chapters 1-6 (pp. 3-74)

Vocabulary

disdain (3)	impassive (4)	miasma (7)	accoutrements (11)
hiatus (13)	geriatric (20)	neurasthenia (21)	ambivalent (30)
symbiotic (34)	cynicism (35)	fastidious (49)	assuage (53)
anoxia (55)	kendo (56)	soporifically (60)	wattles (64)
inference (65)	unequivocally(67)	vestige (68)	demeanor (68)

Discussion Questions

1. Identify the two ways in which spectators at the trial view Kabuo Miyamoto. (*p. 3, Some think his stillness reflects disdain for the proceedings. Others feel the stillness veils his fear about the verdict.*)
2. Describe the murder trial scenario. (*p. 4, Eighty-five citizens are present. The atmosphere is subdued and contemplative. The small, run-down courtroom is gray-hued and simple with sluggish steam radiators, a cramped gallery, a bench for the judge, a witness stand, a plywood platform for the jurors, and scuffed tables for the defendant and his prosecutor. Snow is falling outside.*)
3. How long had Kabuo Miyamoto been incarcerated? (*p. 5, 77 days*)
4. Describe San Piedro, the island, and Amity Harbor, the town. (*pp. 5-6, San Piedro has enormous hills with soft green cedars in every direction. Five thousand "damp" souls reside on the island. Amity Harbor, the island's only town, is "an eccentric, rainy, wind-beaten sea village" with few businesses; usually a quiet community.*)
5. Discuss the significance of the meeting between Ishmael and Hatsue. (*p. 8, They obviously have known each other before, yet something has happened to "distance" them.*)
6. Explain when and how Carl Heine dies. (*pp. 9-19, September 16—His fishing boat, the Susan Marie, is sighted adrift. Sheriff Moran and Deputy Martinson discover his body caught in his fishing net. He appears to have drowned; his skull is crushed.*)
7. Identify three important pieces of information defense attorney Nels Gudmundsson stresses as he cross examines Moran. (*pp. 20-27, the fog; lights and batteries on Carl's boat; possibility of head injury as he is removed from water*)

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8. How does Ishmael Chambers learn of Heine's death? (*p. 29, While checking on a sermon topic, the minister's wife, Lillian Groves, tells him about the death.*)
 9. Describe Ishmael's life after the war. (*pp. 30-31, 36, He attends school in Seattle and is influenced by reading classics. He returns to San Pedro Island filled with cynicism and runs the newspaper founded by his father, Arthur.*)
 10. Discuss the importance of Arthur Chamber's influence on his son Ishmael. (*pp. 35-36, As a newspaperman, Arthur understands his responsibility for truth in actions and words. Ishmael remembers him as "morally meticulous." His mother states, "You're your father's son."*)
 11. What is the fishing ethic to which the most respected fishermen on San Pedro adhere? (*pp. 38-39, 41, Autonomy: fishing alone is better than fishing with others; silence; toiling; pursuing no one and cultivating radio silence.*)
 12. What compromise does Ishmael reach with Sheriff Moran? (*pp. 44-45, Moran will give him information about the investigation if Ishmael will call the death an accident in his newspaper.*)
 13. Identify important clues the coroner, Horace Whaley, discovers while conducting an autopsy on Carl Heine. (*pp. 49, 54, 55, Carl's watch is stopped at 1:47 a.m.; foam from his mouth and nose indicate he had been alive when submersed in water; wound behind ear could have been caused by a narrow, flat object.*)
 14. Who first casts suspicion on Miyamoto? How? (*pp. 55, 58-59, Horace Whaley. Heine's head wound has the impression of a blow by a gun butt similar to those Whaley had seen left by Japanese soldiers trained in kendo [stick fighting] during the Pacific War.*)
 15. Discuss important points Gudmundsson reveals in his cross examination of Whaley. (*pp. 62, 64, 66, The foam from Carl's mouth indicates drowning; he has a minor cut on the right hand; the head wound could have been caused by a fall against the gunnel of a boat.*)