



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# So B. It

Sarah Weeks



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# S o B . I t

Sarah Weeks

## 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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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, inferring, predicting, supporting judgments

### Literary Elements

Story mapping, characterization, conflict, setting, theme, point of view, author's purpose, figurative language, genre, suspense

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, word maps, definitions, sorting

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, interviewing, drama

### Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, dialogue, poetry, essay, report

### Critical Thinking

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

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—family relationships, history, legal rights, Clara Barton; Geography—map; Science—mental disorders, agoraphobia, health, psychology, color vision deficiency, body language, ethics, brain anatomy, bath bombs, bird migration; Math—computation; Art—illustration, design, models; Music—soundtrack

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** Reno, Nevada; Liberty, New York

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** truth, mental disorders, identity, challenges, determination, love, family, friendship

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

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** candid, conversational

**Mood:** serious, pensive

**Date of First Publication:** 2004

## Summary

Twelve-year-old Heidi lives in Reno, Nevada with her loving, mentally disabled mother known only to Heidi as “So B. It.” Their apartment adjoins with that of their caretaker and agoraphobic neighbor, Bernadette. Though Heidi lives a sheltered life, she is happy and intelligent, thanks to Bernadette’s love, common sense, and homeschooling. Heidi accepts her mother’s limitations until one of the 23 words Mama speaks begins to haunt her. Heidi searches for the meaning of “soof” and the truth about her and Mama’s missing past. Then photos in an old camera provide new clues. A determined Heidi travels by bus to Liberty, New York, depending only on her lucky streak and the kindness of strangers to get her there. At Hilltop Home, a facility for the disabled, Heidi finds some answers and meets new family members. When Mama dies, Heidi discovers that “soof” has more than one meaning and that sometimes a person can’t know the entire truth.

## About the Author

Sarah Weeks was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As a child, she enjoyed music and writing, both of which are still her main interests today. She is a graduate of Hampshire College and New York University. Weeks was a songwriter before becoming the author of more than 40 picture books and novels. She sings on many of the CDs that accompany her picture books, which often reflect her love of animals. Her middle-grade novels are known for their humor. Weeks says she particularly enjoys writing the dialogue, or “boy speak,” in her “Misadventures of Guy Strang” series. In 2006, she and other authors founded Authors Readers Theatre, a traveling group of authors who perform scenes from their books, mainly for audiences of teachers and librarians. Weeks lives in New York City with her two sons.

*So B. It* is Weeks’ first novel for young adults and her first novel featuring a girl as the main character. The girl character in *So B. It* is more serious than Weeks’ usual main characters. Weeks says the novel took her four years to write, and the story came together slowly, rather than “in one big chunk.” *So B. It* appeared on the *LA Times* bestseller list and was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. The novel also won the 2004 Parents’ Choice Gold Award and Virginia Young Readers Award.

## Heidi–Soof

Heidi lives with Mama, who has a “bum brain,” and Bernadette, who has agoraphobia. Bernadette claims that Heidi’s lucky streak, a talent that helps with monthly expenses, began 12 years ago when Mama showed up at Bernadette’s door with baby Heidi. Mama calls herself “So B. It.” With her limited vocabulary of 23 words, she can’t tell Heidi about their past. Heidi wants to know her personal history, and she wants to know the meaning of “soof,” Mama’s only nonsensical word.

Vocabulary
phobia
skittered
high-tailed
puled
scrunching
rimple
hornswoggled
culler
glimmer
spattered
plunk
dimwit
ritual
foible

### Discussion Questions

1. Compare the chapter entitled “Heidi” with the first two pages of the chapter entitled “Dette.” Why do you think the author begins the novel with Heidi referring to events in the future? Would the chapter “Dette” be an effective place to begin the story? *(The first chapter provides clues to what the story is about. Hinting at future events draws readers into the story, arousing curiosity about how Heidi will learn the truth. Answers will vary. Discussion could include whether the chapter “Dette” also draws readers into the story or if the details slow the story’s pace.)*
2. Why does Heidi choose “dinosaur skin” as the color of truth? What color would you choose? Why? *(No one knows for sure what color dinosaurs were. Truth is often murky and can change or be elusive. However, knowing or not knowing the truth about something doesn’t change the facts. Answers will vary.)*
3. How is Mama like a “broken machine”? Compare and contrast Mama with Bernadette. *(Mama is mentally disabled and only capable of doing simple tasks, such as opening cans. Although she appears to be fine on the outside, her mind does not function correctly. Unlike Bernadette, Mama can’t fully communicate or take care of Heidi. Like Bernadette, she expresses emotions such as love, joy, and frustration. Both women have a form of mental disorder.)*
4. How would Heidi’s life be different without Bernadette? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: Since Mama isn’t capable of taking care of a daughter or a household, social services would probably take Heidi away from Mama and put her into foster care. Heidi wouldn’t have Bernadette’s love or benefit from Bernadette’s knowledge and teaching skills. Bernadette’s agoraphobia forces Heidi to grow up quickly and take on more responsibilities, such as running errands and earning income. However, Bernadette’s disorder also contributes to Heidi’s slow social development.)*
5. Analyze Bernadette’s explanation for why Mama and Heidi don’t receive monthly bills. Why does she tell Heidi this? *(Bernadette tells Heidi that she and her mother are just lucky, implying that the utility companies and landlord must have simply overlooked or forgotten to charge them. Since utility companies and landlords don’t lose track of customers and tenants, at least not for extended periods of time, someone else may be paying the bills for Mama and Heidi. Bernadette obviously doesn’t want Heidi to realize this.)*
6. What does Bernadette mean when she says Heidi shouldn’t “abuse [her] gift”? Do you think it is okay for Heidi to play the slot machine even though doing so is illegal and she knows she will win? *(Bernadette doesn’t want Heidi to be greedy and take advantage of her lucky streak. Answers will vary. Discussion should include whether it is ever okay to break a law, even when it is for survival.)*

7. Why do you think Bernadette is willing to care for Mama and Heidi? What does she receive in return? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: Bernadette is a self-reliant person who cares about others. She felt sorry for Mama and Heidi. In return, Bernadette receives love, a substitute family for her deceased father, companionship, and assistance with errands outside the house.)*
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Heidi's homeschooling? *(Answers will vary. Advantages may include that Bernadette is intelligent, patient, and a good teacher who passes on her wide variety of interests and love of knowledge to Heidi. Disadvantages may include that there are some things Bernadette does not know and that homeschooling Heidi deprives her of her peers' company. Therefore, her social skills would be stunted.)*
9. Do you agree with Bernadette that a person's history is unimportant as long as the person knows who s/he is now? Is Heidi justified in wanting to know her personal history? *(Answers will vary. Discussion should cover how much a person's past influences the person they are/become. It should also include how people Heidi's age struggle with identity issues. Also, students should realize that Bernadette knows her own family history and therefore she can't truly understand how Heidi feels.)*
10. **Prediction:** What is the meaning of "soof"?

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Begin a Character Web like the one on page 26 of the guide for Heidi, Mama, and Bernadette. Add information about each character as you read the novel.
2. **Health/Speaking:** Working in small groups, research agoraphobia. Then, participate in a classroom discussion about the ways the disorder limits a person's lifestyle.
3. **Critical Thinking:** Bernadette teaches by using vivid descriptions that immerse Heidi in the world of the studied subject. Choose five subjects, and then write a descriptive paragraph about each. Make your writing as vivid as possible.
4. **Science:** Heidi worries that Mama can only see the color blue. Research color blindness or color vision deficiency. Create an illustration about an area of your research that you find interesting (e.g., causes and symptoms, impact on career choices, colors that animals see).

### Shh-Out

Heidi and Mama love to run errands until the day a bus frightens Mama. Back in the apartment, Heidi and Bernadette realize the bus stirred up one of Mama's memories. Frustrated that Mama can't communicate her memory, Heidi is discouraged until she finds an old camera in the back of a drawer. The developed pictures include one of a pregnant Mama and a woman Heidi assumes is Mama's mother. The pictures were taken at a place called Hilltop Home in Liberty, New York. When Thurman Hill, the director of Hilltop Home, won't return Bernadette's phone calls, Heidi convinces Bernadette to step outside the apartment. Bernadette collapses with fear, and Heidi determines she will go to Liberty by herself.

## Main Idea Chart

Chapter	Main Idea
1 "Heidi"	
2 "Dette"	
3 "Hello"	
4 "Soof"	
5 "Shh"	
6 "Tea"	
7 "Out"	
8 "More"	
9 "Back Soon"	
10 "Go"	
11 "Good"	
12 "Again"	

# Word Map

Definition

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Synonym

Antonym

Vocabulary Word

Pronunciation

Part of Speech

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sentence

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_