



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **A Solitary Blue**

Cynthia Voigt

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

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Cynthia Voigt

## 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

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story elements, theme, similes, foreshadowing, symbolism, setting

### Thinking

Research

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, Readers Theatre

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, antonyms, word mapping, analogies

### Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/contrast, cause and effect

### Writing

Analysis, journaling, letter-writing, poetry, description

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## Summary

Seven-and-a-half year old Jeff Greene understands his mother's note, but he can't help feeling abandoned. Jeff's crusading young mother, Melody, explains that she is leaving home so that she can fight for a better world. She has to leave Jeff and his father, a placid history professor several years her senior, so that she can give more time to the fight for clean air, for women's rights, and for the many other causes she has adopted. Although Jeff learns to help keep the household in order, to maintain the regularity he knows his father wants, he misses his mother's exuberant presence. While he likes some of the live-in graduate students his father hires to help with housework, he is lonely.

Then, in the winter of sixth grade, Brother Thomas, a friend of his father's who teaches theology at the University, comes into Jeff's life. When Jeff has a serious illness, it is Brother Thomas who urges Professor Greene to contact Melody in order to find out the name of Jeff's pediatrician. Brother Thomas oversees Jeff's recuperation and Jeff returns to school, where he is having difficulty with his classes.

That spring, Melody invites Jeff to spend the summer with her in her wealthy childhood home in South Carolina. When he arrives in Charleston, Jeff remembers once again how much he loves the mother he hasn't seen in four years. Throughout the summer, even though Melody often leaves Jeff on his own while she goes to various meetings, Jeff finds contentment. He enjoys exploring Charleston and visiting with his great-grandmother "Gambo," who, in turn, is happy to recount the details of their family's history, stressing, always, the importance of his position as the last of the Boudraults.

When he has to return to live with his father, Jeff longs for the day when he can choose to remain with Melody. He writes her several letters, but gets no answer. He spends long hours learning to play the beautiful guitar that Horace, his father, gives him for Christmas. He feels closer to Melody when he plays the tunes she taught him.

Jeff's next summer stands in bitter contrast to the previous one. Gambo, debilitated now, resents his presence, as do elderly Aunt Boody and Aunt Dodo. Melody takes a trip with her sarcastic boyfriend, Max. Hurt, Jeff rows to a deserted island where he tries to sort out his feelings. Melody returns a couple of weeks later, and finally, Jeff explodes in anger when she criticizes the Professor. Melody tells him angrily that she had only married his father because she was pregnant, and was disappointed when the baby turned out to be a boy. Devastated, Jeff returns to his father.

Jeff keeps his grief and his flunking grades to himself, until his father finds him at an amusement park one day, instead of in class. For the first time, the two talk about how Melody has hurt and manipulated each of them. The Professor mentions the added income coming in from the publication of his new book, and suggests they move. They find a country cabin on the Chesapeake Bay in rural Crisfield. Jeff does well in his schoolwork, and makes two friends, Phil and Andy. Jeff enjoys crabbing with his father, and the two begin to open up to each other.

The comfortable world into which Jeff starts to settle is rocked by a letter from Melody. She wants to divorce the Professor and have custody of Jeff, who now finds the thought of living with his mother

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## Anticipation Guide

**Directions:** Rate each of the following statements before you read the novel and discuss your ratings with a partner. After you have completed the novel, rate and discuss the statements again.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_  
strongly agree strongly disagree

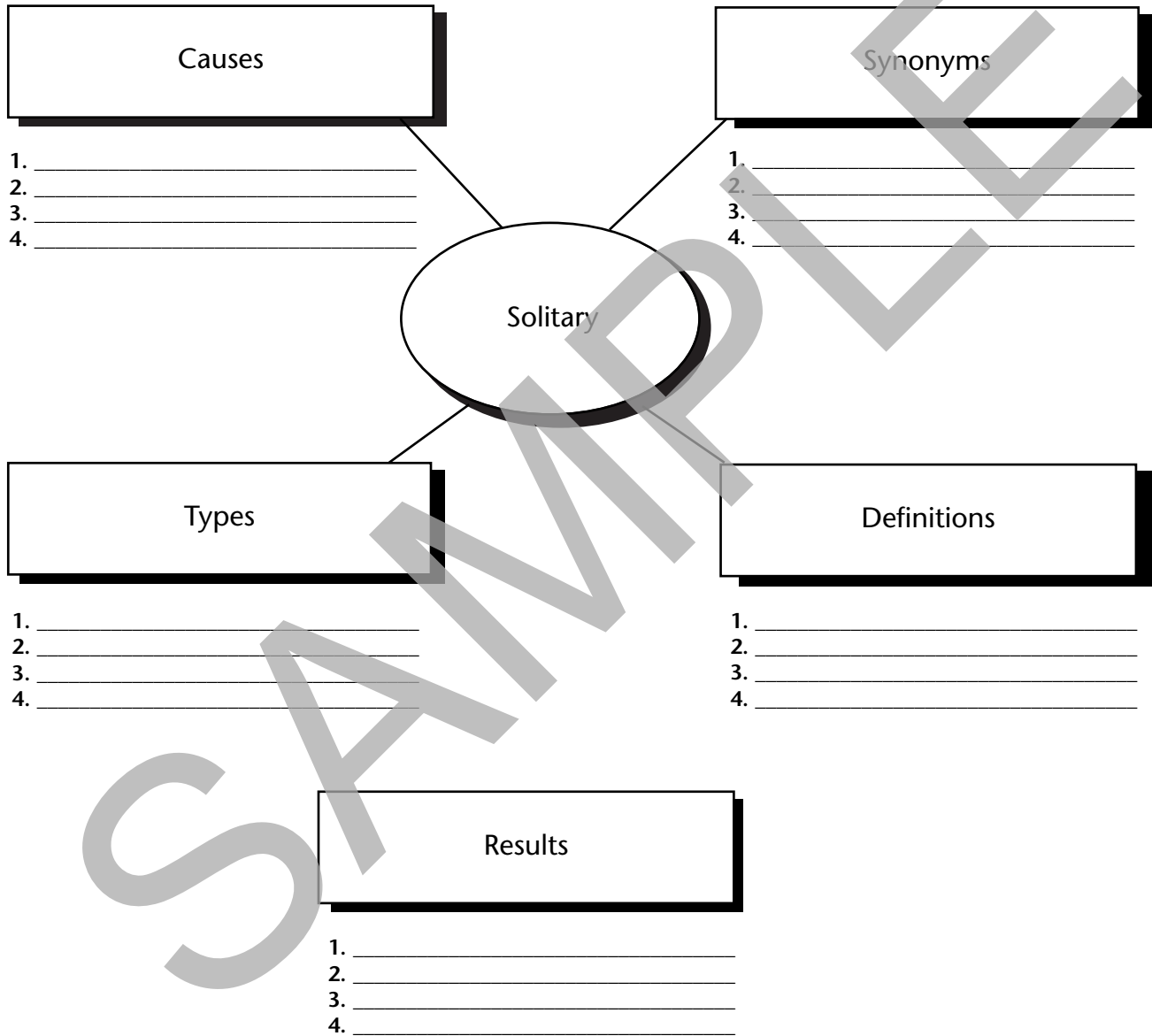
**Before**      **After**

- |   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. Children with both parents in the home are better off than children in single parent families. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. When there is no one around, I feel lonely.  | _____ | _____ |
| 3. A parent who does not stay in touch with a child after a divorce might have a good reason.     | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Sometimes it is better to keep what's bothering you to yourself.                               | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Divorced parents shouldn't talk to their children about each other.                            | _____ | _____ |
| 6. It's hard to be the new kid in school.   | _____ | _____ |

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## Concept Web

Directions: Fill in the blanks below.



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## Chapter 1, pp. 3–28

### Vocabulary

eaves 7	carafe 8	khaki 13	placards 18
suppressed 22	syntax 22	relapse 24	bronchial 25
solitary 26	unremitting 26		

### Vocabulary Activity

1. What is something you might find under the eaves of an old house?
2. What is something you might put into a carafe?
3. What is something you might make out of khaki?
4. Why do protesters sometimes carry placards?
5. Why might you try to suppress a laugh?
6. Who might correct your syntax?
7. When might you have a relapse?
8. Where are your bronchial tubes?
9. When did you last spend some solitary hours?
10. What might cause an unremitting noise?

### Discussion Questions

1. The first chapter covers a lot of ground compared with the rest of the book. How much time does Chapter 1 cover? (*four years*) What do we know after reading only the first chapter? (*In a novel, there can be several settings, problems, goals, episodes, resolutions. Guide students to a few of the episodes included in the first chapter, including 1. Melody leaves; 2. Jackson has Jeff do housework; 3. Tony teaches Jeff to cook; 4. Andrew leaves Jeff alone; 5. Ian arrives; and 6. Brother Thomas is introduced.*)
2. Why does Melody leave? Do you think she tells the real reason in the letter? (*She said she needed more time to help save the world.*)
3. Melody herself did not appear in the first chapter. You can still form an impression of her. What is it? (*young, exuberant, crusading, irresponsible mother*) Use the attribute web on page 8 of this guide.
4. What sort of man is the Professor? (*studious, quiet, with a love of order*) Was he a poor father? Why or why not?
5. How did Jeff react when his mother leaves? Compare this with how his father reacted. (*Jeff missed her and tried to maintain the order his father liked. The Professor didn't talk about Melody and arranged for graduate students to care for Jeff.*)

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6. How did Jeff's pneumonia change his life? (*The Professor realized how he had been neglecting Jeff. Also, the illness forced the Professor to get in touch with Melody again, and she, in turn, decided to reestablish contact with Jeff.*)
  7. Brother Thomas seemed to watch Jeff closely when they first met. What do you suppose Brother Thomas was thinking? (*He seemed to be aware of Jeff's loneliness.*)
  8. Did Brother Thomas remind you of any adults you have known? He thought it would be better if father and son talked about Melody. Do you agree?
  9. Think about how Jeff acted toward adults (*his father, Brother Thomas, his teachers*). Why didn't he ever misbehave? Did he remind you of yourself in any way? How was he different from you? Make a T-comparison chart.

	Jeff	You
Physical Characteristics		
Dress		
Speech		
Actions		

10. Why do you think Cynthia Voigt began the story with a letter? How would the story have been different if Voigt had simply told us about Melody's leaving home? (*The opener is an attention-grabber and the wording of the letter shows a lot about Melody's nature, concerns, and relationship to the little boy she is leaving.*)
11. **Prediction:** Do you think Jeff will enjoy his visit with his mother?
12. Imagine that you are Brother Thomas. You keep a personal diary. What is your entry during the time Jeff is sick?

## Chapter 2, pp. 29–60

### Vocabulary

debarked 29	unspecified 29	negotiated 34	perpetuates 36
subdued 36	bemused 37	fluted 37	veranda 38
dominated 39	bodice 40	crepey 41	wrought-iron 43
opulent 43	ironic 45	ecology 45	ambled 47
dappled 47	speculation 51	serenade 52	logy 53
prohibitive 54	convoluted 57	reticent 59	insignificant 60