



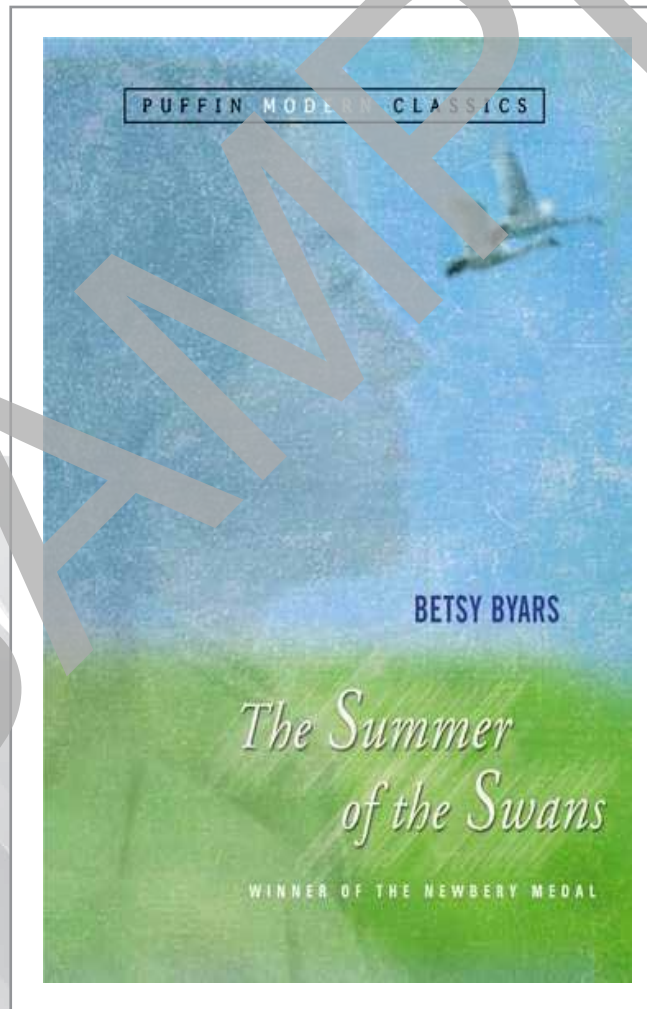
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Summer of the Swans

Betsy Byars



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Summer of the Swans

Betsy Byars

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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Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
About the Author.....	3
Newbery Medal	3
Introductory Information and Activities	4
Twenty-Three Chapters	7
Chapters contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions and Activities, Predictions, Postreading Activities	
Supplementary Activities.....	24
Teacher Information	32
Recipes from Southern West Virginia	36
Bibliographies	37
Assessment for <i>The Summer of the Swans</i>	44

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Comprehension

Sequencing, comparison/
contrast, using reference
materials, inference

Writing

Letter, advice column,
descriptive, figures of speech

Vocabulary

Antonyms/synonyms, word
maps, analogies

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
participation in dramatic
activities

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot
development

Summary of *The Summer of the Swans*

Sara's fourteenth summer is not a happy one. She feels that no one understands her, she's not pretty, and she has to watch her retarded brother, Charlie, during the day. Sara takes Charlie to watch the swans, and that night he leaves the house to go to find them. Charlie is soon lost. Unable to speak, and afraid of people, he wanders deeper and deeper into the woods. From this troublesome time, Sara learns what it means to really care about someone else.

About the Author:

Betsy Cromer Byars was born August 7, 1928, in Charlotte, North Carolina. She married Edward Ford Byars, a professor of engineering, June 24, 1950. They have four children, Laurie, Betsy Ann, Nan, and Guy. She attended Furman University, 1946-48; Queens College, B.A. in 1950.

Byars had a happy childhood. Her father worked at a small cotton mill, so brought home free cloth, enabling Byars to learn to sew at an early age. "I sewed fast, without patterns, and with great hope and determination, and that is approximately the same way that I write."

When she went to college, she majored in math, for that is what her father wanted her to do, and what her sister had done before her. "I had discovered early in life that things were easier all around if I lived up to my father's expectations." However, calculus was the determinant that made her go to her father to tell him that she could not be a mathematician. She switched her major to English, and married after graduation so that her only writing during the next few years was of letters and shopping lists. When her husband went back to school to study for his doctorate, Byars started her creative writing. His doctorate completed, Byars and her family moved to West Virginia, where her children's novels were written.

Byars was awarded the Newbery Medal for *The Summer of the Swans* in 1971. Her books have been translated into nine languages, and many have been dramatized on national television. She has said, "There is no activity in my life which has brought me more pleasure than my writing."

Newbery Medal:

The medal is named for eighteenth-century British bookseller John Newbery, the first bookseller and publisher to make a specialty of children's books. It is awarded annually by the Association For Library Service To Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of The Most Distinguished Contribution To American Literature For Children. (See Teacher Information/John Newbery.)

Chapter 1—Pages 9-16

Vocabulary:

peasant 9

inscrutable 10

pathetic 10

kaleidoscope 13

Vocabulary Activity:

Use all four words in the same sentence. Make an illustration for the sentence.

Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. Who are the characters introduced in the first chapter? (*Sara Godfrey, Boysie—the dog, Wanda Godfrey, aunt, Charlie Godfrey*)
2. What are the physical imperfections of Sara and Wanda? (*Pages 10-11, Sara has big feet, and Wanda has “perfectly terrible hands,” and stubby fingers.*)
3. Boysie, the dog, is 84 years old, in people age. (*page 10*) How old is that in dog age? How do you know? (*Divide 84 by 7 to find out Boysie’s dog age, which is 12.*)
4. Is Sara enjoying the summer? (*No*) Sara compares the summer to a toy and a playground activity. What are they? (*page 13, kaleidoscope; page 16, seesaw*) Why do you think that she uses these particular things? Do you think that these are two things that most people can relate to, and have experienced? (See Postreading Activity #1 and Postreading Activity #2.)
5. Have you noticed anything special about Charlie? (*Pages 13-16, Charlie has trouble putting the candy back on the lollipop stick.*) Start an attribute web for Charlie. Keep it in view, and add to it as more is learned about him. What do others say about him? say to him? think of him? How do others treat him? act toward him? What is his speech, his behavior like? (See page 43 of this guide.)

Postreading Activities:

1. Compare Sara’s bad summer to something other than a kaleidoscope or seesaw.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph or poem about how you think that Sara is feeling about the summer. For example:

*Enveloped by the darkness inside,
I am surrounded by the brightly colored glass.
The kaleidoscope of life is turned,
And from the known I must pass.*

*Pass into the uncertain, the who knows what?
I stumble and am rendered unsteady,
Unshapely, and distorted to view.
Yet an eye peers in, whether or not I am ready.*

-
3. Start a story map. What do you think that the problem is? What is the goal? Add to the story map as the story evolves. (See page 42 of this guide.)
 4. Start attribute webs for Sara and Wanda. Add to them as the story evolves. (See page 43 of this guide.)
 5. Make predictions as to what this story might be about. Record the predictions for verification as more of the story is read.

Chapter 2—Pages 17-19

Vocabulary:

illusion 18

silhouette 19

Vocabulary Activity:

Silhouette: A likeness cut from dark material and mounted on a light background, or one sketched in outline and solidly colored in. Make a silhouette of someone or something.

Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. What additional information are we given about Charlie? (*Pages 17-19, Charlie has a nervous habit of moving his feet back and forth on the steps. Charlie does not talk. Charlie does not know how to make a tent with a blanket over a clothesline. Charlie is small in size for being 10 years old.*)
2. On page 19 the author tells us that, although Sara was talking about the summer, “He [Charlie] could tell from the tone of her voice that she was not really talking to him at all.” Has that ever happened to you? Would you like to tell us about it? Have you ever talked to someone, and felt that the person was not listening to you? What happened in this case? How did you feel about it?

Postreading Activities:

1. Charlie seems to be able to understand what is said to him, even though he does not speak. Many mentally retarded people can be taught to use sign language, so that they are able to communicate with others. Start to learn sign language. (If you are not comfortable teaching it to the children, invite a volunteer to come in to teach it. There are also videocassettes available for that purpose. See Bibliography/Sign Language and Audio-Visual Bibliography/Sign Language.) You may wish to read the short book *We Laugh, We Love, We Cry* to the children. It is about two young mentally retarded sisters who learn sign language. (See Bibliography/Mental Retardation/Bergman.)
2. Write out directions for making a tent out of a blanket hung over a clothesline. Make an illustration to go with the directions.