



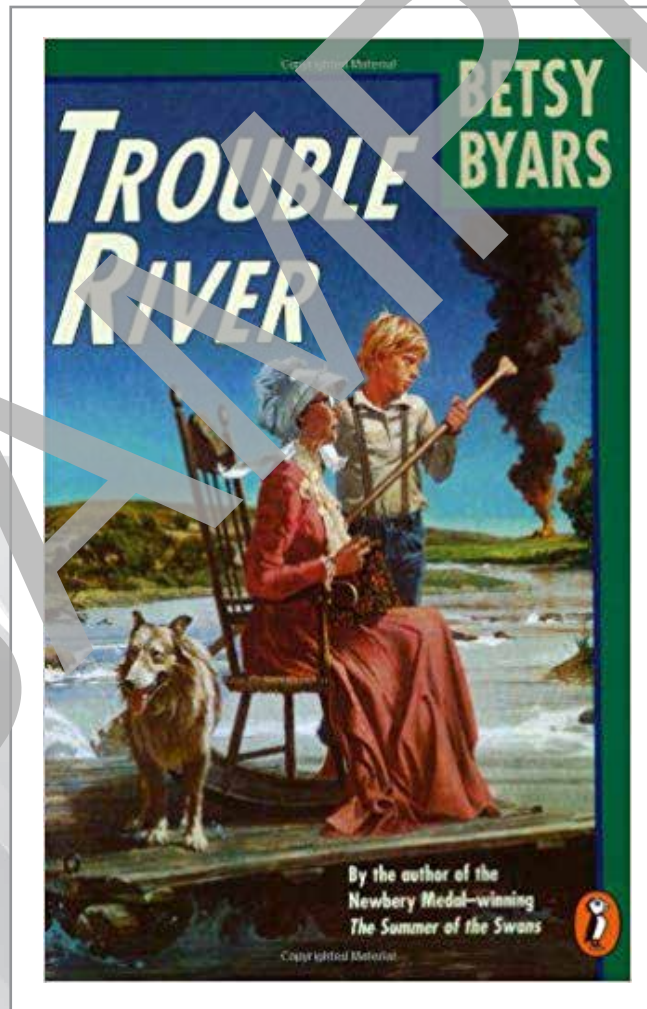
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Trouble River

Betsy Byars



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Trouble River

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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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting

Vocabulary

Word mapping, categorizing

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, dramatization

Literary Elements

Stereotypes, characterization,
foreshadowing, story
elements, metaphor, simile,
personification

Thinking

Brainstorming, visualizing,
research

Summary of *Trouble River*

Dewey and Grandma escape the raiding Indians by a wild river raft ride. Grandma was not the easiest partner as Dewey faced the dangers of the rapids, wolves, Indians, and the uncharted river. Grandma's pithy comments, criticism, and humor distracted but also helped Dewey to make it in this survival story of pioneer life.

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 from 1946 to 1948 and was graduated from Queens College 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."

Introductory Information and Activities

Initiating Activities

1. Look at the title. What do you think it means? Generate as many possibilities as you can.
2. Look at the cover. What significant things do you see? Make up some questions about the cover.
3. Read the back cover. Predicting is a very important part of reading. What do you learn about the characters? What is the setting? When and where do you think this novel takes place? What do you think the problem of the story is? Does the back cover make you want to read the book? Why or why not?

-
4. Have the students brainstorm associations with Indians and Native Americans. Jot ideas around the central word on a large sheet of paper. Help students “cluster” the ideas into categories.

Brainstorming rules:

- All ideas count.
- Add details to others’ ideas.
- Adapt others’ ideas.
- Suggest unusual ideas.
- Regroup ideas.



5. What is a stereotype? (*A stereotype is an oversimplified idea of something based on limited experience. Most stereotypes contain only a kernel of truth so they are dangerous if taken to be the whole truth.*)

What are some stereotypes of Indians?

- savage, bloodthirsty
- stoic, loyal follower
- hunter, tracker
- noble, wise old chief
- evil medicine man
- heavysset “squaw”
- “Indian princess”

As we read this novel, check and analyze for stereotypes using these points:

- Check illustrations.
- Check the story line.

References

Axtell, James. "Who Invented Scalping?" *American Heritage* 8, no. 3, 1977.

Franklin, Paula. *Indians of North America*. New York: McKay Company, 1979.

LaFarge, Oliver. *A Pictorial History of the American Indian*. New York: Crown, 1974.

Chapter 3: "Escape by Moonlight"—Pages 40-54

Plot Summary

Dewey and Grandma put their possessions together and begin the dangerous river raft trip.

Vocabulary

uncomprehending 40

encounter 42

velours 47

keelboats 49

momentarily 52

starkly 40

scanning 44

satchel 47

dismay 49

murky 53

urgency 41

massacres 45

boars 48

gingerly 51

Vocabulary Activity

Students will make predictions about how the author will use vocabulary to tell about the setting, characters, the problem or goal, the actions, resolution, or feelings of a character in the story.

Discussion Questions and Activities

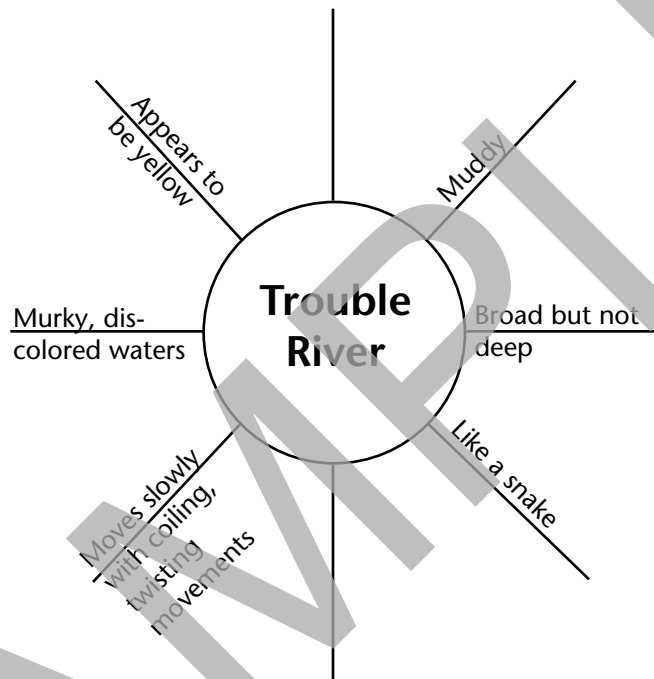
1. What upset Dewey almost more than the encounter with the Indian? (Page 42, *He saw Grandma cry with tears rolling down her cheeks but no sound.*)
2. Was Dewey's plan to hide from the Indians realistic? What did Grandma say that might be a derogatory description? (Page 43, *"They got animal noses. They can smell you out."*)
3. Dewey had two different impressions of Indians from Grandma and Pa. Discuss the descriptors on page 44.
 - "lean and dusky on their shaggy, neglected ponies"
 - "eaten corn cakes...dropping on their haunches"
 - "never lifting their eyes from the hearth"
4. Why did Grandma fear the Indians? (Page 45, *She had heard stories of "Indian massacres, of families wiped out, of children stolen, of women scalped."*) Was there some truth in these stories?
5. What did Grandma bring with her on the raft? (Page 47, *her white bonnet with lace and her velours satchel*) If you had to leave your house in a fire or tornado, what would you take with you? If you had time to plan, might you take some other things?
6. Why did Dewey take the time to let the pigs and the cow and calf out of their pens? (Page 48, *He did not want the Indians to kill the animals.*)

7. Why do you think Dewey got Grandma her rocking chair? (Page 51, So she could ride like a lady going down the river in style.)

8. **Prediction:** What problems will Dewey and Grandma face on the river trip?

Supplementary Activities

1. Use pages 52-53 for a Reader's Theatre.
2. Begin an attribute web for *Trouble River*.



Chapter 4: "On the Unknown"—Pages 55-68

Plot Summary

Charlie, Grandma and Dewey start down the river on the raft.

Vocabulary

testily 57
frenzied 63

liable 58
pungent 63

cringe 59
defy 64

Vocabulary Activity

In cooperative groups, make bingo cards using the vocabulary words from all the chapters read. The cards may be started at this time and added to as the book is read. The caller of the game may use the vocabulary words or the word definitions. Make a caller answer card.