



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Wednesday Wars

Gary D. Schmidt

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Wednesday Wars

Gary D. Schmidt

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

Critical Thinking

Compare/contrast, research, evaluation, brainstorming

Comprehension

Identifying attributes, main idea, predicting, cause/effect, sequencing

Writing

Essay, character sketch, journal, poetry, summary, newspaper article

Listening/Speaking

Interview, oral presentation, discussion, dramatization

Vocabulary

Definitions, synonyms/antonyms, parts of speech, context clues, glossary

Literary Elements

Climax, figurative language, theme, character analysis, setting, point of view, genre, conflict, symbolism

Across the Curriculum

Health/Sports—bullying, Vietnamese recipes, New York Yankees, camping, running; Science—architecture; Social Studies—the Vietnam War (especially the Battle of Khe Sanh), relief agencies, Jewish and Christian traditions, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, political campaigns; Art—diorama, caricature; Literature—works of William Shakespeare, *Treasure Island*

Genre: fiction

Setting: Long Island, New York; 1967–1968

Point of View: first person

Themes: love, war, reconciliation, family, coming of age, peace, hope, success, perseverance, identity, friendship

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self

Style: narrative

Tone: candid, conversational, humorous

Date of First Publication: 2007

Summary

In 1967 Long Island, seventh grader Holling Hoodhood is the only student in his class who does not attend Catechism or Hebrew School on Wednesday afternoons. Therefore, Mrs. Baker has him study Shakespeare, which Holling ultimately connects to his own life. Amidst classroom debacles, family crises, and political upheaval, Holling must navigate the seventh grade without getting “killed” by his classmates or disappointing his teacher. He must also avoid affecting the family business negatively. As Holling learns the value of freedom and the power of love over hate, he develops self-confidence and realizes that he can stand up to his father and follow his own path.

About the Author

Personal: Gary D. Schmidt was born in Hicksville, New York in 1957. He grew up during the Vietnam War, much like the main character in *The Wednesday Wars*. He was raised Baptist and grew up with friends from school who were Irish Catholic or Jewish. This sometimes left him as the only Protestant kid in class. He was told at a young age that he was a poor reader, but one teacher worked with him on his reading and he eventually became a voracious reader and book collector. One of his favorite authors is Katherine Paterson, and one of his favorite books is *The Little World of Don Camillo* by Giovanni Guareschi, which inspired the school’s name “Camillo Junior High” in *The Wednesday Wars*. Schmidt is a medievalist, a devoted husband, a father of six children, and an author of over 30 books.

Education/Career: Schmidt graduated from Gordon College in 1979, which was the same year he married his wife, Anne. Schmidt continued his education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and received his M.A. in English in 1981 and his Ph.D. in medieval literature in 1985. Since then, he has taught English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Schmidt’s novel *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2004) is a Michael L. Printz Honor book, and both this novel and *The Wednesday Wars* (2007) are Newbery Honor books. Schmidt later used the character Doug Swietek as inspiration for *Okay for Now* (2011), a “spin-off” of *The Wednesday Wars*.

April

Mrs. Baker discovers that a mission is underway to rescue American military at Khesanh. Mrs. Sidman becomes principal of the school. Kowalski and Associates goes out of business, and Meryl Lee's family plans to move to her grandmother's house. The death of Martin Luther King, Jr. saddens people, and the nation is divided over the upcoming presidential race. Holling's father does not show up to take him to Opening Day at Yankee Stadium, so Mrs. Baker takes him instead. Holling's father and sister get into an argument about her future and her attending college after she graduates. Danny and Holling race in their first cross-country meet. Danny is in the lead until he runs into the woods and becomes injured. Holling listens to Mrs. Baker, passes the eighth graders, and wins the race.

Vocabulary

allusion
arteries
commuters
humane
contour
improper
scaffolding
levitate
brittle

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Mrs. Sidman replaces Mr. Guareschi as the school's principal? *(Answers will vary. The school board members may have believed Mr. Guareschi was not handling the problems at the school very well [e.g., the rats living in the walls and the bus accident involving Holling]. The way Mrs. Sidman handles the rat problem might have convinced the school board she is a better candidate for the job. They likely admire her problem-solving skills and resolve to reinstate her job after a much-needed break.)*
2. How does the upcoming presidential election further divide Mr. Hoodhood and his daughter? *(Mr. Hoodhood and his daughter's differences and beliefs cause another argument, creating more tension between them. Mr. Hoodhood does not support Bobby Kennedy, and his daughter does. He believes Bobby Kennedy is a Communist, while his daughter thinks Kennedy is the only hope for the country to restore peace and end the war in Vietnam. Mr. Hoodhood's daughter believes President Johnson resigned from the presidency because "he doesn't want to lose, not because he cares about America's future" [p. 186]. Mr. Hoodhood believes that Richard Nixon will win the election instead of Bobby Kennedy.)*
3. Why doesn't Holling's father take him to Opening Day at Yankee Stadium? How does this affect Holling? *(Holling's father views the game as unimportant. He seems disinterested when he tells Holling, "Isn't there enough happening in the world that you shouldn't have to go into the city for a baseball game" [p. 191]? Then Holling discovers his dad is busy working at the time he is supposed to take Holling to the game. Since Holling's father often puts his business and his reputation above his family, Holling is not surprised. Holling is humiliated because everyone in his class knows what happened when they see him in class after lunch recess. He thinks, "I suppose there may have been a more miserable hour sometime in my life, but I couldn't think of what it might have been" [p. 193]. Holling is disappointed because he worked diligently to finish all of his schoolwork in the morning so he could leave early for the game. He is even more disappointed because his father broke his promise to take him, even though he knew how important the game was to Holling.)*
4. How does Mrs. Baker make Holling, Danny, and Doug's experience at Yankee Stadium much more exciting? What is foreshadowed as Mrs. Baker talks with Joe Pepitone? *(Because Mrs. Baker arranged for the boys to meet some of the Yankees players one Wednesday afternoon, they recognize and acknowledge the boys and invite them onto the field. When some of the Yankees recognize Mrs. Baker from the Melbourne Olympic Games, they all gather around to talk to her and photographers take her and the boys' picture with the Yankees. Then, the Yankees give the boys a tour around the Stadium upon Mrs. Baker's request. Joe Pepitone tells Mrs. Baker the owner of*

Yankee Stadium is looking for a classical architect to repair the stadium, and Mrs. Baker asks to meet him. This foreshadows a possible way for Mr. Kowalski to get a contract, save his business, and stay in Long Island.)

5. How does Holling feel about the upcoming cross-country meet? Why does he stay behind the eighth graders during practice? Is he making the right choice? Why or why not? (*Holling is nervous about the meet because he doubts his abilities. He is also scared to pass the eighth graders because he knows it will anger them. Answers will vary. Some students might believe this is a wise decision that will protect Holling. Other students might think Holling is allowing the eighth graders to bully him, and as a consequence, he is not reaching his true potential.*)
6. Why does Holling decide to outrun the eighth graders during the cross-country meet? (*As Holling begins his last lap, he sees Coach Quatrini yelling for him to keep going, the Hupfers cheering him on, and Meryl Lee waving her dried rose with a ribbon. Holling might realize how important his winning is to Danny and his family since the eighth graders injured Danny and ruined his chance at winning. The biggest impetus is when Mrs. Baker commands Holling to pass the eighth graders. He says, "And that was all it took" [p. 207].*)
7. **Prediction:** What will happen to the Kowalskis?

Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Continue adding to your figurative language chart. Examples: **Simile**—"spring break...dropped as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath" (p. 198); **Metaphors**—Coach Quatrini: "pied ninny" and "blind mole" (p. 191); Holling's heartbeat: thunder (p. 205)
2. History/Writing: Research news stories from the day Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Write an essay explaining how his death affected America.