



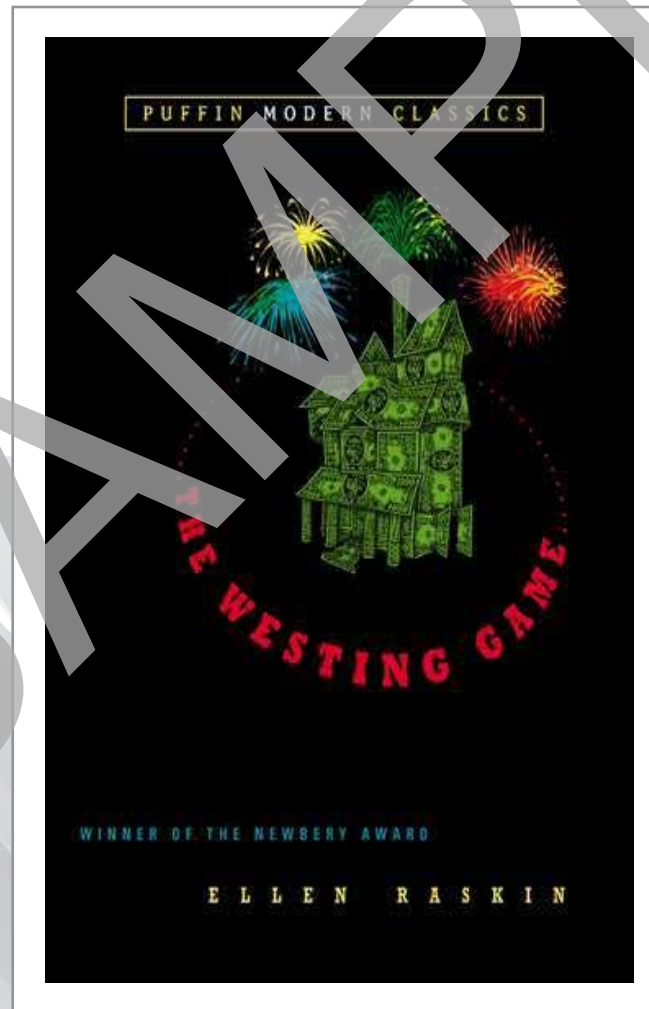
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Westing Game

Ellen Raskin



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Westing Game

Ellen Raskin

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

Brainstorming, researching,
creative thinking, analyzing
compare/contrast, predicting,
drawing conclusions

Comprehension

Evaluating and making decisions,
cause/effect

Writing

Poems, essays, summary, novel
chapter, short stories, scene, letter,
review

Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion,
poetry performance, musical
performance

Vocabulary

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

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict/resolution,
character analysis, point of view,
theme, symbolism, figurative
language, genre, foreshadowing,
tone, author's purpose

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies/History—Supreme
Court, Howard Hughes, news
media, America; Finance—stock
market; Health—Down syndrome,
running/exercise; Science—
weather, ornithology;
Music—“America the Beautiful,”
patriotic songs; Art—drawing,
illustration, posters, collage

Genre: young-adult mystery

Setting: Sunset Towers on Lake Michigan

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: identity, deceit, family, truth, redemption, education, individual potential/purpose

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

Tone: informative, detailed, intriguing, humorous

Date of First Publication: 1978

Summary

A mysterious millionaire selects a group of people to compete in a game to inherit his estate after his death. The 16 unlikely heirs are paired up and given clues to help them solve the puzzle. Prejudices emerge and secrets are revealed as the group investigates one another in the face of bombs, injuries, and suspected murders. As though playing a game of chess, Samuel Westing predicts his heirs' next moves, and he stays one step ahead—until the end.

About the Author

Ellen Raskin—illustrator, author, and designer—was born on March 13, 1928, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She spent her childhood creating characters with her sister and attending family reunions—full of colorful characters—at Lake Michigan. At age 17, she entered the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She married in 1960 and had a daughter, Susan. To pursue her art career, Raskin moved to New York. She divorced and, in 1965, married Dennis Flanagan, with whom she lived until her death at age 56 on August 8, 1984.

Over the course of her career, Raskin designed over 1,000 dust covers, including the original cover for Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. She wrote and illustrated her first picture book, *Nothing Ever Happens on My Block*, in 1966. Her young-adult novels include the highly autobiographical *The Mysterious Disappearance of Leon (I Mean Noel)* in 1971, *The Tattooed Potato and Other Clues* in 1975, the 1975 Newbery Honor Book *Figs & Phantoms*, and the 1979 Newbery Medal winner *The Westing Game*. Raskin enjoyed using wordplay in her books and challenging readers to realize that everything isn't as it appears.



Teacher Note: The following Character List contains spoilers and should not be revealed in its entirety before students have read the novel. Please review the list carefully so you can determine the appropriate points in the story at which to discuss each character's identity with students.

Chapters 1–3

In one day, Barney Northrup leases every apartment in Sunset Towers, a building that faces the Westing mansion. Though the mansion is supposedly abandoned, Sunset Towers residents notice smoke coming from the chimney on Halloween. Rumors circulate among the residents that Samuel Westing's corpse is rotting inside the mansion. Turtle Wexler accepts a bet to stay in the mansion that night.

Vocabulary	
trifle	
erected	
breach	
asylum	
hassock	
gaunt	
ample	
putrid	

Discussion Questions

1. How does understanding the genre of the novel affect the way you read it? *(Answers will vary, but readers generally understand that they must process clues and closely analyze the characters to solve the riddle. Rather than simply following the plot of a story, readers will pay greater attention to details because they are not just reading for leisure; they must think critically to attempt to piece together a puzzle.)*
2. Why does the author say there is no such person as Barney Northrup? What else is unusual about Sunset Towers, and what could be the reason for the oddities? *(Answers will vary. The author suggests that "Barney Northrup," the man who leases the*

apartments, is not who he seems to be. Otis Amber, at age 62, is a curious choice as a delivery boy, and students may think he was hired for a particular purpose. Residents' names are written on the mailboxes before they sign leases, which may give readers a sense that everyone associated with Sunset Towers will play some role in the yet-to-be-defined Westing game.)

3. What prompts Turtle Wexler to enter the Westing mansion? What does this decision say about Turtle's character? *(Sandy McSouthers and Otis Amber tell Turtle, Doug Hoo, and Theo Theodorakis a story about kids who entered the Westing mansion as part of a bet the previous Halloween. They say the kids ran out screaming almost immediately and one of them has since only said, "purple waves" over and over. Turtle accepts the same challenge for \$2 per minute that she stays inside. Answers will vary. Students should note that trespassers are not allowed on the Westing property and the presence of chimney smoke indicates someone may be home. Turtle's decision to take this bet shows that she is fearless, adventurous, and foolish. She is young, impulsive, and seemingly desires attention.)*
4. Compare and contrast Angela and Turtle Wexler. *(Angela is a golden-haired beauty who is described as being as lifeless as a mannequin. Although the favored daughter, Angela is emotionless as she stands in her wedding gown. She shows kindness, however, such as when she offers to hem her sister's costume. Turtle is younger and full of life. She stands up for herself by kicking people in the shin when they touch her braid. She is a risk-taker, unpredictable, and messy. She doesn't get much attention from her mother.)*
5. Describe the relationship between Theo Theodorakis and his brother Chris. *(Theo, a high-school senior, takes care of his younger brother, who must use a wheelchair and suffers from seizures. He brings Chris food, tells him stories to help calm him, and generally knows what his brother needs. Chris enjoys his brother's company and considers him a confidant. When his brother isn't around, Chris spends his time birdwatching.)*

6. Describe Sydelle Pulaski. How might she factor into the Westing game based on what is revealed about her? *(Answers will vary. Sydelle is a secretary, and she is limping. She complains that no one ever pays attention to her or listens to her. She buys paint, brushes, and wooden crutches. Students might be suspicious of her complaints and unusual purchase. Also, she vows that Turtle will “be sorry she kicked her in the shin” [p. 15] and that “No one ever notices Sydelle Pulaski...but now they will” [p. 16]. Students may interpret these statements as threats and think Sydelle might be the novel’s main antagonist.)*
7. **Prediction:** What will happen if and when Turtle enters the Westing mansion on Halloween night?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Characterization:** Begin collecting details about each character using the Character Details Chart on pages 27–28 of this guide. Continue adding details to the chart as you read. Use the chart to help you predict who may have murdered Samuel Westing and who will inherit his estate.
2. **Literary Devices:** Begin a list of the figurative language used throughout the novel. Continue adding to your list as you read. Examples: **Similes**—“[They were] gaping like statues cast in the moment of discovery...” (p. 6); “...Angela Wexler stood...as still and blank-faced pretty as a store-window dummy” (p. 9); “[Westing was] dead as a squashed June bug...” (p. 14); **Metaphor**—Westing’s room: a gloomy tomb (p. 14)

Character Details Chart

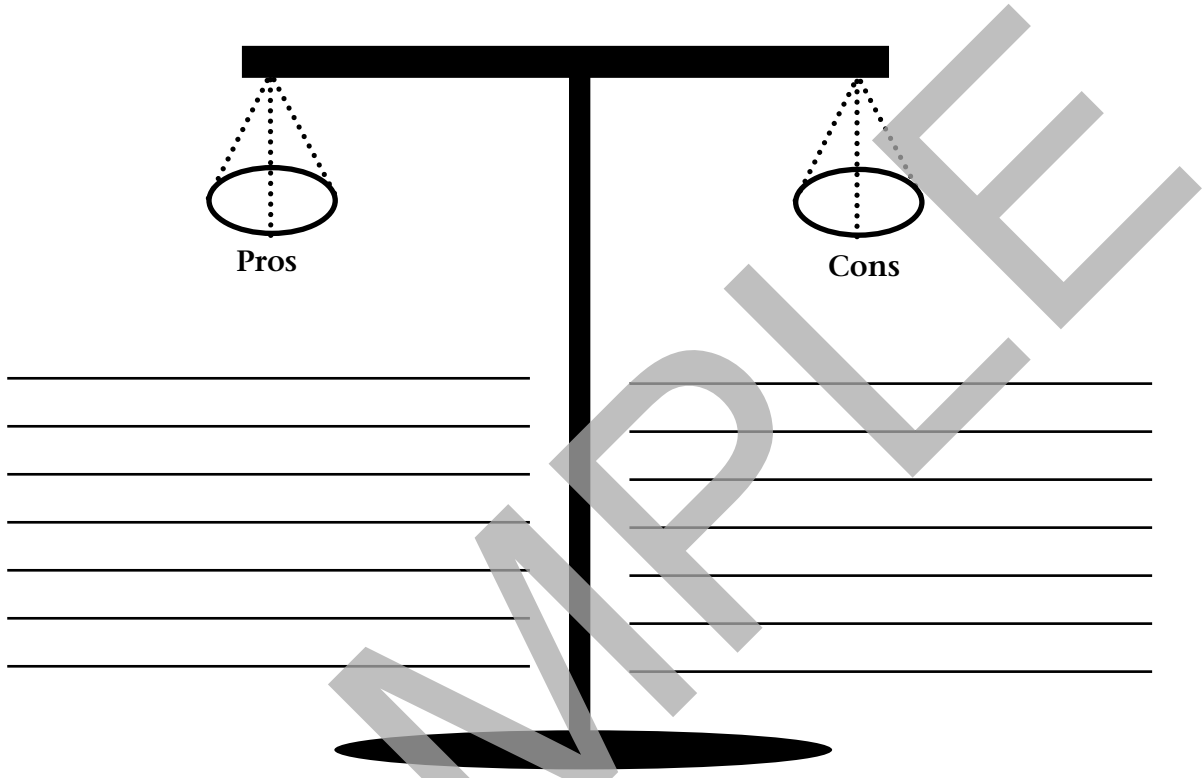
Directions: In the chart below, add details about each character as you read *The Westing Game*. Include page numbers for easy reference.

Character	Detail/Page#	Detail/Page#	Detail/Page#	Detail/Page#
Otis Amber				
Flora Baumbach				
Berthe Erica Crow				
Dr. Denton Deere				
Julian R. Eastman				
Judge J. J. Ford				
Doug Hoo				
James Shin Hoo				
Madame Sun Lin Hoo				
Sandy McSouthers				
Barney Northrup				

(continued on next page)

Pros and Cons

News Medium: _____



Character Web

Directions: Complete the attribute web below by filling in information specific to a character in the novel.

