



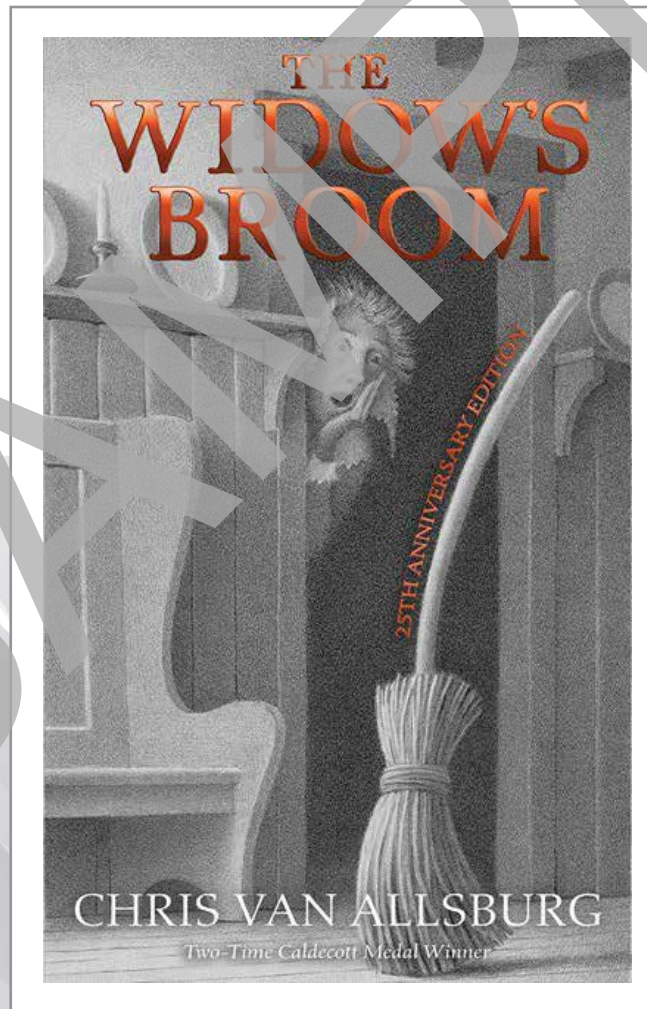
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Widow's Broom

Chris Van Allsburg



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Widow's Broom

Chris Van Allsburg

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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Summary

A widow, Minna Shaw, has a very clever broom that helps around the house, chops wood, fetches water, feeds the chickens, brings the cow in from pasture, and even picks out simple tunes on the piano. Unfortunately, some of Minna's neighbors are not as happy as she about the broom. After the broom is no longer able to ignore the taunting, teasing, and tapping of two of the Spivey boys and their dog, and gives them back some of their own in kind, the neighbors demand that the widow give up the broom.

About the Author

Chris Van Allsburg was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 18, 1949. He was educated at the University of Michigan, receiving a B.F.A. in 1972. He did graduate work at the Rhode Island School of Design, and received an M.F.A. in 1975. He currently teaches classes at the Rhode Island School of Design, and is an artist, sculptor, author and illustrator of children's books. He has received many awards for his illustrations, including the Caldecott Award for *Jumanji*.

Chris Van Allsburg enjoyed his early art classes at elementary school, and that enthusiasm was rekindled in college. He enjoyed making things with his hands, and became, primarily, a sculptor. He included painting and drawing in his art later.

He has said, "When I do a book, I follow my own reaction to what I've drawn or written. I do think about kids when I write, because regardless of the premise of the story it must be accessible to the fairly early reader—maybe not first grade, but a second-grade reader. I don't know where my ideas come from. Each story starts out as a vague idea that suddenly materializes as a completed concept. The inclination to believe in the fantastic may strike some as a kind of a failure in logic—but it's really a gift. A world that might have Bigfoot and the Loch Ness monster is clearly superior to one that definitely does not."

Note:

The Houghton Mifflin Company hardback edition was used in preparing this guide. Other editions may yield differing page references.

When using this study guide, please be selective and use the suggestions and activities that would be most appropriate for your use and group of children. It is not intended that you do everything that is included in this guide, but that discretionary choices be made.

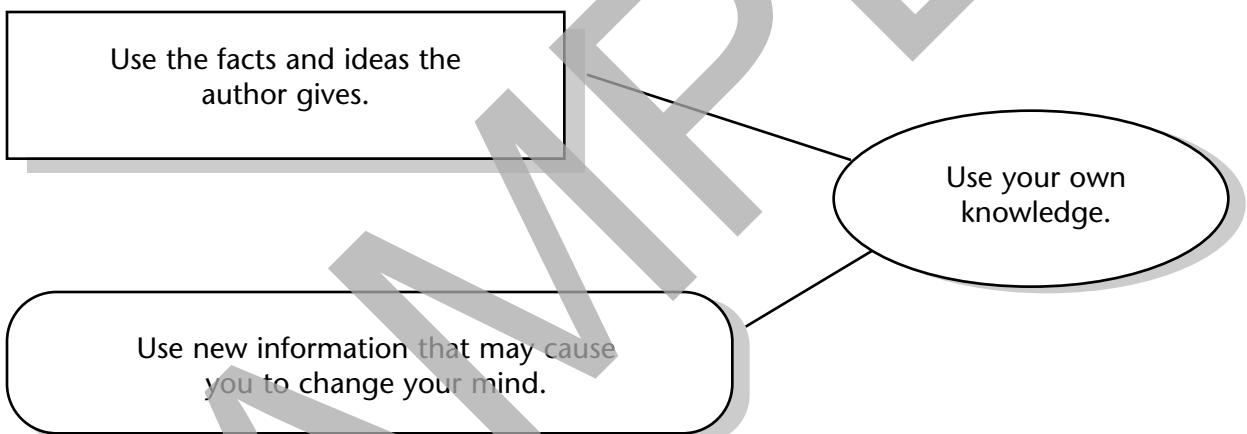
Initiating Activity

Collect and display as many different kinds of brooms as you can. Have smaller ones hanging in the room. (See Teacher Information, Brooms, for some suggestions.) When children have gathered in a group, point out the display, and ask if anyone knows in what category these items belong, and the names of the items. Make a list.

Using Predictions in the Novel Unit Approach

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how the conflict will be resolved, which details given by the author will be important to the plot, which details will help to fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses. As students work on predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader’s thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give us to help us in making our predictions? Why are some predictions more likely than others?

A predicting chart is for students to record their predictions. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, you can review and correct previous predictions. This procedure serves to focus on predictions and to review the stories.



Predictions:

Section Four: From “They opened the closet door, revealing the slumbering broom.” through “The broom bowed, put a log on the fire, and played another tune.”

Vocabulary Activity

Think of as many words as you can that begin with the same letter/sound as the word brave. Make a list. From that list, choose some words to make a tongue twister. Start with two words, and add on. Try to say each one three times, getting faster and faster. For example:

Brown Bear

Brave Brown Bear

Big Brave Brown Bear

Beautiful Big Brave Brown Bear

Bounding Beautiful Big Brave Brown Bear

Vocabulary	
straw	
next	
white	
brave	
circled	

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. What do the men do with the broom after they remove it from the closet? (*They tie the broom to a stake, take it outside, drive the stake into the ground, pile straw around it, and set it on fire. The broom is soon turned to ashes.*)
2. Look at the illustration, showing Minna Shaw looking at the smoke rising in the air. How do you think that she is feeling? How do you think that the men are feeling? Does the illustrator let you know the feelings of the people without using words? Discuss. (See Postreading Activity #1.)
3. Do the Spiveys find their dog? If so, where is it? (*Yes; they find their dog. It is caught in the branches of a tall spruce tree.*) (See Postreading Activity #2.)
4. What news does Minna Shaw have for her neighbors? (*She tells the Spiveys that she has seen the ghost of the broom, white as snow and carrying an axe.*)
5. What finally makes Mr. Spivey believe Minna Shaw? (*Mr. Spivey sees the broom circle the Spivey house. Each night the broom gets closer and closer, until one night it taps lightly on the door of the house.*)
6. Why do you think that the Spivey family moves away? (*Opinion—answers will vary.*)
7. Was the special broom of Minna Shaw really burned? What broom is with her at the end of the story? (See Postreading Activity #3.)

Postreading Activities

1. The way in which you hold your body often tells others what you are feeling/thinking. Show us how your body would look if you were: standing next to someone that you really liked; anxious to leave the person that you are with; very tired; very sad; etc.

2. A spruce tree is an evergreen tree with needle-like foliage and drooping cones. The author tells us that the Spivey's dog gets caught in the branches of a tall spruce tree after it is thrown into the air by the broom. Think of different ways to get the dog down.
 - Make a list of the different ways suggested by the children.
 - Invent a “dog-removal” device. Make an illustration of your device, and give instructions for its use.
3. How do you think that it came to be that the special broom was not burned after all? Do you think that Minna Shaw made some plans to save the broom?
 - Make up a class story to fill in what might have happened after the incident with the Spivey boys and dog, and the arrival of the men to remove the broom. Then fill in what might have happened after the broom burning, and the sighting of the “ghost” broom.
 - Allow the children to take turns being Minna Shaw and the broom. Show us what might have happened.
4. What might happen next? Will different people move into the vacated Spivey house? Will someone steal the broom? etc.
5. Complete the story map.
6. Complete the attribute web for Minna Shaw.
7. Complete the attribute web for Mr. Spivey.

SAMPLE