



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Yearling

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Yearling

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

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

Thinking

Interpreting, evidence,
compare/contrast, pros/cons,
research, forming opinions

Comprehension

Cause/effect, classifying,
details, generalizing,
inferencing, predicting,
summarizing, main idea

Literary Elements

Characterization, plot
development, setting,
foreshadowing, symbolism,
simile, metaphor, theme,
description, imagery

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral report, music

Vocabulary

Context clues, synonyms,
antonyms, word maps

Writing

Essay, list, editorial, narrative,
report, diary entry

Across the Curriculum

Art—posters, collage;
Education—evaluation;
Music—culture/history;
Science—agriculture, animal
science, fire safety, health
issues, weather;
Social Studies—culture,
geography, history, maps,
research; Women’s Studies—
characterization, roles

Genre: fiction

Setting: north-central Florida, after the Civil War

Point-of-View: third-person

Themes: coming-of-age, tragedy, nature, family sacrifice/love, farming, obedience, care, love, survival, hunting ethics, loneliness, peace

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

Style: narrative

Tone: initially bright; darkens as events unfold

Date of First Publication: 1938

Summary

The Yearling is a coming-of-age story set in the 1870s Florida scrub country. Jody Baxter enjoys a happy boyhood on a hardscrabble farm surrounded by wilderness, but he wants a pet. When his father is forced to kill a doe, Jody acquires her fawn, which he calls Flag and loves dearly. That year a series of events threaten the family's survival, including a deadly flood and the illness of Jody's beloved father. The worst happens for Jody when Flag, grown to a yearling, leaps fences and ruins the newly planted crops. His mother shoots Flag, but only wounds him. She tells Jody he must kill the deer. Jody obeys, but immediately flees. After near starvation, Jody heads home. He has learned that he can accept life's harsh lessons and go on.

About the Author

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was born in Washington, D.C., in 1896. At the age of eleven, she won a two-dollar prize for a story published on the Washington Post's children's page. While in high school she won second place in McCall's Child Authorship Contest for a short story. In 1918, after she graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Rawlings made writing her lifelong career. She published newspaper articles, short stories, books, poems, and a memoir. She received a number of honors and awards for her work. In 1939 she won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Yearling*, her best-known novel published in 1938. An MGM film version of *The Yearling* appeared in 1946 and a television remake in 1994. Rawlings died in Florida in 1953. *The Yearling* has become a classic.

Background Information

A key to *The Yearling*, as to most writings by Rawlings, is the north-central Florida scrub locale. Rawlings visited the area, fell in love with it, and moved there in 1928 to own and manage a citrus grove. She is known for her vivid, accurate, and appreciative depictions of Cross Creek, Florida, and its inhabitants. *The Yearling* particularly emanated from an editor's suggestion for a novel about a boy in the Florida scrub country. During her residency at Cross Creek, Rawlings stayed with and talked to local people whose knowledge of area history, animals, and hunting provided the basis for episodes in the novel. A notable feature of the novel is dialogue written in local dialect. The flutter-mill, an important symbol at the novel's beginning and end, was a common toy in the area. Gordon E. Bigelow's *Frontier Eden*, published in 1966 by the University of Florida Press, is a good source to consult for background. The front and back covers provide useful maps.

Initiating Activities

1. **History/Culture:** Tell students that the novel is set in Florida after the Civil War. Briefly describe the situation for returning Confederate soldiers in the American South. Research the specific role of Florida in the Civil War to help the students understand the novel as a whole and a specific portion of the narrative in Chapter 2.
2. **Geography/Science:** Tell students that the setting functions as a character in the novel. Have encyclopedias, dictionaries, and field guides to Florida available for students to research names of trees, shrubs, wildflowers, birds, or animals. Gather and provide information about the Ocala National Forest located within north-central Florida.
3. **Social Studies/Maps:** Display a map of Florida and locate north-central Florida rivers and other landmarks, including towns and cities.
4. **Multimedia:** Show videotapes and post pictures or photographs that depict farm life in the American South in the second half of the nineteenth century. To prepare for a scene in Chapter 4, give information about smokehouses and the smoking process as a way to preserve meat. This information will help students understand the farming and farm life described in the novel.
5. **Agriculture/Culture:** Research the climate and the crops that can be grown in Florida. Tell students that they may encounter names of foods that are unfamiliar to them. Have dictionaries and cookbooks of Southern recipes available for students to consult as they read the novel.
6. **Hunting/Survival:** Show sketches or photos of a muzzle-loading gun and a powder horn. Explain that this gun was used by American fur traders in an earlier period. This information will be helpful when reading early chapters in the novel.
7. **Language:** Tell students that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was a resident of the area in which she set the novel, allowing her to write with remarkable accuracy. Explain that she wrote dialogue in the dialect of the inhabitants. To introduce students to the dialect, select portions of dialogue from the first few chapters (for example, pp. 9–14 in Chapter 1; pp. 26–28 in Chapter 3; p. 32 in Chapter 4, notably the expression “You belong to figger”). Either in writing or orally, have students translate selected dialogue into standard English. Allow students time during class to discuss, either in pairs or small groups, dialect that confuses them.
8. **Literary Analysis/Characterization:** Have students create character webs (see page 6 of this guide) as they read the novel.
9. **Literary Analysis/Predictions:** Have students make predictions (see pages 7–8 of this guide) as they read the novel.

Vocabulary Activities

1. **Vocabulary Sort:** Using the chart on page 9 of this guide, have students sort vocabulary words into categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.
2. **Thesaurus:** Remind students that they can find synonyms in a thesaurus as well as in a dictionary. Have students construct thesaurus entries for selected words: the word, part of speech, short definition, synonyms, and any antonyms. Examples include: meager (9), addled (14), tumult (49), boisterous (54), aggravate (63), humiliated (111), jovial (345), controversy (382)
3. **Vocabulary Word Maps:** Using the Vocabulary Word Map on page 10 of this guide, have students complete word maps for selected words from the novel, for example: isolation (20), feist (30), sulky (54), boisterous (54), torrential (233), rheumatism (241), decimated (271), festivities (338).

Vocabulary Word Map

Synonyms

Character or event from the novel that is suggested by the word

Word

Definition in your own words

Word used in a sentence

Chapters 28–31, pp. 371–402

In January, Penny prepares seedbeds. With Jody, he pities a lone, lame wolf that plays with the dogs. In February, he has rheumatism. He worries about spring planting because the year's living depends on the results. Flag, who can no longer be confined, scatters peas on the table and destroys a large part of the tobacco seedbed. In March, fearful for Flag, Jody helps Penny plant. When Penny ruptures himself pulling up a stump, he doesn't recover. Flag pulls up the corn. Penny tells Jody to replant and build a high fence. Although Jody works furiously and Ma Baxter helps, Flag clears the fence into the second planting. Penny orders Jody to shoot Flag.

Vocabulary
fictitious (372)
incentive (379)
righteous (381)
plausible (382)
controversy (382)
ebbed (386)
inviolable (392)
beseching (393)
frigid (396)

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Penny's response to Grandma Hutto's departure. What is the meaning of a "stone thrown at some distance, and meant for some one else, had struck him" (p. 372)? *(Answers will vary, but could mention that Penny is filled with sorrow at Grandma Hutto's departure. He gets hurt when the Forresters intended to hurt Oliver. Penny wants peace, but he can't have it. p. 372)*
2. Discuss Jody's thoughts of the Huttos after they leave. Why does he think of them as he does? *(The Huttos seem unreal, like characters in a tale or another world. Students may infer that Jody thinks this way because his world consists of Baxter's Island. He never travels far from it. p. 372)*
3. Discuss the incident of the lone, lame wolf playing with the dogs. Why does Jody think of Flag? Why does Penny pity the wolf? *(Answers should include: The wolf plays with his enemies, who have accepted him. Jody wishes Flag could understand that he was spared desolation in the forest. Flag eased Jody's loneliness. Penny pities the wolf because it is hurt and lonesome. Students may infer that Penny pities the wolf because he knows what it's like to lose kin, as he has lost Grandma Hutto and Oliver. Also, Penny may see the lameness and think of his own aches from rheumatism. p. 376; refer back to pp. 241, 368–369)*
4. When Penny lies crippled with rheumatism and worries about the spring planting, Ma Baxter says he spared Jody from the work for too long. Do you agree with her? *(Answers will vary.)*
5. When Flag destroys the tobacco plants intended for a cash crop, why does Penny's kind, reasonable response depress Jody more than his mother's rage? *(Answers will vary.)*
6. Discuss the scene that begins with Flag bounding out of the rain and ends with Penny saying he is grieved because Flag and Jody are a pair of yearlings. Is this scene important? Why, or why not? *(Answers should include: Penny studies the deer with an unfathomable expression, eyes narrowed and speculative. He seems a stranger to Jody. Penny looks down. Students may infer that Penny grieves to see his son grow up. He cannot shield him from adult problems. Flag is one of those problems to face. For the scene's importance, answers will vary, but students could discuss the significance of Flag's appearance late in the book. Students should be aware that a turning point is in process. pp. 386–387)*
7. Ma Baxter has always insisted that Jody wash his feet before going to bed. Why doesn't she wake him to remind him of it when he falls asleep after working with Penny to plant tobacco and corn? *(Answers will vary.)*

8. When Flag eats most of the sprouts from the first corn crop, Penny says that he and Ma Baxter have “come to a agreement” (p. 394). Would Ma Baxter agree with him? *(Students may infer it is not an agreement because Ma Baxter’s face is flushed, her mouth is in a tight line, and she appears hot with defeat. She pats her foot and stares straight ahead without speaking. Her face is a frigid mask when she helps Jody with corn for the second planting. She talks aloud angrily to herself. She cooks a meager and indifferent meal. pp. 394–397)*
9. On the sixth day of Jody’s efforts to build the fence, why does Ma Baxter offer to help? What does this say about her? *(Students may infer she didn’t know Jody had it in him to work that way. Answers will vary. p. 400)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Research/Agriculture: Ask students to list the crops that the Baxters plant. Then have them research modern farming methods and compare them to the planting methods of Penny and Jody.
2. Writing: Have students write a paragraph about an unusual event they observed involving a bird or an animal.
3. Writing: Have students write about a time they parted with someone or something precious to them.

Chapters 32–33, pp. 403–428

Jody tries to take Flag to Jacksonville, but Flag won’t cooperate and goes home. Flag feeds across the corn and the cow-peas. Jody tells Penny he can’t shoot Flag. Penny, bedridden, talks to Ma Baxter, who critically wounds Flag. Jody screams hateful words at his parents, then follows Flag and kills him. Jody sets out for Boston in Nellie Ginright’s dugout. He spends several days lost and hungry. Men on the mailboat find him, feed him, and send him home. It is April. Jody stops to build another flutter-mill, but it holds no comfort. He runs home to Penny, who weeps for joy. Penny tells him “life goes back on you,” but a man should “take it for his share and go on” (p. 426).

Vocabulary
intercepted (407)
docile (407)
immersion (413)
ravenously (419)
languor (420)
scrawny (420)
discarded (421)
renewed (421)
loitered (421)
stupor (422)

Discussion Questions

1. What advice does Pa Forrester give Jody about Flag? Would Buck Forrester have answered any differently? *(Pa says to shoot the yearling. Love has nothing to do with corn. You can’t have a thing eating the crops. Answers will vary. p. 406)*
2. When Flag won’t walk on a halter to Jacksonville, Jody asks him why he’s grown up “so unlawful” (p. 407). Has Jody fooled himself all along about Flag’s wild nature? *(Answers will vary.)*
3. Penny tells Jody more than once that there is no way to keep Flag from destroying the crops they depend on to live. Is there a way to save Flag? Why won’t Jody listen to his father? *(Answers will vary.)*
4. What does Jody scream at his parents when he snatches the gun to end Flag’s torment? Is Jody being fair to either parent? *(Jody screams that Ma Baxter did it on purpose because she had always hated Flag. Jody yells at Penny because he told Ma to do it. Answers will vary. p. 410)*