

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Cheaper By the Dozen

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Item No. 201465

Cheaper By the Dozen

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define a memoir and discuss the use of the first-person narrative.
2. discuss the significance of setting on the characters.
3. explain allusion and identify several uses of allusion in the book.
4. understand and appreciate the comic elements of the story.
5. define personification and give an example of its use.
6. write a brief character sketch of the main character of the story.
7. discuss the elements of an episodic book and the merits or shortcomings of a story that is not chronologically developed.
8. recognize and discuss the elements in this novel that have given it long life.
9. infer a major theme in the story and support it by citing specific evidence from the novel.

Cheaper By the Dozen

Lecture

Cheaper by the Dozen is a warm remembrance of what life was like in a family of twelve children at the beginning of the twentieth century. Written by two of the children, the book centers on the larger-than-life character of the father, a famous efficiency expert, and his humorous attempts to run the family according to his theories of efficiency. Because the book is a series of amusing vignettes, there is no on-going sequence to suggest traditional plot development; there is only the loosest of chronological arrangement to the episodes. Note that the setting is of no particular relevance to the story; we are provided just enough background to understand each episode.

Cheaper by the Dozen is a depiction of another time period in America's history, and the presentation of that time may appear quaint to today's reader. Occasionally, historical references are obscure, and the morality of that era may seem almost unreal to contemporary audiences.

All references come from the Harper Torch edition of *Cheaper by the Dozen*, copyright 1948.

Cheaper By the Dozen

Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. Often, the preface or dedication of a book can give the reader some indication of the theme of the book or provide important background information. In a two-paragraph essay, explain what the dedication, “to Dad, who only reared twelve children, and to Mother, who reared twelve only children” means to you.
2. Memoirs (a French word meaning “memories”) are traditionally written in the first person, because they are usually autobiographical. What advantages or disadvantages does a memoir give the author?
3. When Mother says to Father, “You sound like Shylock,” the authors assume that the reader understands that Shylock, a character from Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*, represents a ruthless moneylender. Identify two other instances of allusion in the book, and briefly explain what the authors are alluding to.
4. Although the character of Mother is not as clearly defined as Father is, she still emerges as a unique individual, someone who is very different in personality from her husband. Supply as many examples as you can that illustrate the differences between the two personalities.
5. In the family council meeting, Dad says, “This is a democracy – everybody has an equal voice.” Do you think this was really so? Defend your answer.
6. What is personification? Give at least one example of its comic use in the book.
7. If you were writing a letter to a friend, how would you describe Father to your friend? The following are some things you may want to include: what does he look like, what are his creative ways of teaching, what is his sense of humor, what is his concern with using time wisely, etc. Do you think you would enjoy being with such a person? Do you think he likes children and enjoys being with them?
8. The children seem to think that Dad is an effective teacher. Give specific examples from the book that support this belief. If you disagree, supply evidence of Dad’s failure as a teacher.
9. Even though *Cheaper by the Dozen* was written about events that happened over 75 years ago, some of the conflicts that occurred between Mother and Dad and the two oldest girls, Anne and Ernestine, could happen today. Discuss some of the ways that Anne and Ernestine deal with their parents over issues such as hairstyles, clothing, dating, or make-up.
10. The first printing of *Cheaper By the Dozen* was in 1949, and since then, it has had more than eighty re-printings. In effect, it is rarely out of print. What elements in the book make it a constant seller?

6. What is alluded to by the phrases “a terrible swift sword” and “truth usually went marching on”?

7. What is the “assembly call,” and why is it important?

8. How does assembly call prove particularly useful?

9. How would you describe the relationship between the father and the children?

Chapter 4

Vocabulary

pince-nez – eyeglasses that are clipped to the bridge of the nose

1. What is Dad's favorite creature, and why is it so favored?

2. How are the personalities of Mother and Dad different?

3. On outings in the car, why do the family use the woods for a bathroom?

4. What two terms does Dad use for going to the bathroom in the woods, and why does he use them?

Chapter 8

Vocabulary

puttees – strip of cloth wound around the leg from ankle to knee
sparking – courting

1. What prompted the family's visit to California?

2. How did Mother and Dad first meet?

3. As a young man, what did Dad do the first time he went to Mother's house for tea?

4. What troubles occurred on the train trip to California?

5. What was the first thing the children asked for when they arrived at their grandparents' house?
