

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Darkness Before Dawn**

by Sharon M. Draper

written by Kathryn Mitchell

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# Darkness Before Dawn

## Notes

A compelling story written by award-winning novelist Sharon Draper, *Darkness Before Dawn* will lead to meaningful classroom discussions about tragedy, friendship, honesty, personal struggle, shame, fear, and the power of the human spirit.

Set in Cincinnati, Ohio, *Darkness Before Dawn* explores a variety of teenage issues, from drinking and driving to anorexia nervosa, against the backdrop of Hazelwood High School. The protagonist must come to terms with the tragedy in her own life, while extending sympathy to others around her who are struggling with their own issues.

All references come from the Simon and Schuster edition of *Darkness Before Dawn*, copyright 2001.

# Darkness Before Dawn

## Objectives

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

1. identify examples of simile, metaphor, and personification in the novel.
2. identify the use of foreshadowing.
3. summarize passages in the story to demonstrate understanding.
4. discuss character motivation.
5. predict future events in the story.
6. define internal conflict (man vs. himself) and external conflict (man vs. man, man vs. society), and provide examples of them from the text.
7. explain how the protagonist and other major characters change over the course of the story.
8. describe the main characters of the novel.
9. identify the point of view, and distinguish it from other types of narration.
10. explain how the use of a different point of view might affect the story.
11. identify and discuss the climax of the story.
12. understand the symbolism of the butterfly.
13. explain how the author uses silver as a motif.
14. identify and explain similarities among characters.
15. compare and contrast two characters.

# Darkness Before Dawn

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain how the setting of the novel reflects the emotional states of the characters.
2. Compare and contrast three of the mothers in the story: Keisha's mother, Rhonda's mother, and Edna. What effect does each have on other characters?
3. The novel is told in the first-person point of view. Explain the impact a different point of view—such as third-person omniscient—would have on the story.
4. Why do you think Jonathan is successful at manipulating Keisha?
5. Leon turns out to be a good match for Keisha. What is good about him, and why do you think Keisha has never thought of him romantically before?
6. Relate Keisha's poem, "Let Our Circle Be Unbroken," to the events of the novel. Why is the poem a fitting ending for the novel?
7. Explain whether you think the ending of the novel is appropriate or realistic.
8. Write a character analysis of Edna, Rhonda, Jalani, Angel, or Keisha. Be sure to include their personality traits, their motivation in the story, their strengths and weaknesses, and your own opinion of each character.
9. What do you think is the central conflict in the story? Is the conflict internal (man vs. himself) or external (man vs. man and/or man vs. society)? Support your answer with details from the text.
10. How might the story have been different if Jonathan had succeeded in raping Keisha?
11. Is there a hero in the novel? If so, who do you think it is? Explain, and be sure to include your definition of "hero."
12. Consider Keisha, Rhonda, Tyrone, and Leon. Of these characters, which are static and which are dynamic? What major changes do the dynamic characters experience? Explain your answer using details from the novel.
13. Identify the climax of the story. What effect does the climax have on the conflict(s) and the characters?
14. Silver is a recurring motif in the novel. Explain how silver is important to the story.
15. Discuss the title of the novel. What do "darkness" and "dawn" have to do with the plot, characters, or theme?

## Chapter 2

### Vocabulary

**anticipation** – excitement or expectation about something yet to happen  
**boasted** – bragged  
**defiantly** – in a rebellious manner  
**grief** – mourning; sadness about a loss  
**inclined** – eager  
**laced** – tinged or colored  
**macho** – manly  
**mellow** – relaxed  
**mused** – wondered  
**pierce** – to cut  
**resounding** – echoing  
**sauntered** – walked in a proud manner  
**shrink** – [*slang*] a psychiatrist  
**studious** – serious about school  
**tae kwon do** – the Korean art of self-defense  
**tremor** – a quiver; shake  
**wallop** – an impact or blow  
**wiry** – lean, muscular

1. Why are the students glad to see the grief counselors leave?

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2. Why is Keisha resistant to the idea of a new boyfriend?

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3. Why is Monty afraid to go to the picnic?

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4. What does Jalani tell Gerald that helps him relate more to her?

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5. How did Jalani come to live in the U.S.? How did she and her mother end up on their own?

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6. What is Angel's diagnosis, and what might have contributed to her illness?

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## Chapter 15

### Vocabulary

**giddy** – silly; carefree

1. In a previous chapter, Jonathan promised Keisha one dance at the Valentine's Day dance at school. However, at the dance, he tells her "it's probably not a good idea." Why not?

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2. In what way is Keisha dishonest with her parents?

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