

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

# Durango Street

by Frank Bonham

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# Durango Street

## Notes

*Durango Street* by Frank Bonham was first published in 1965. It is the story of a young boy's struggle to survive in a neighborhood dominated by powerful gangs. As part of his probation from the detention center, Rufus knows he must resist joining a gang. Rufus wants to find a better way to live, but he understands the reality of life on Durango Street—to survive, a boy must be connected to a gang.

This story is replete with valuable vocabulary words whose meanings can usually be determined by the context. While the story is sometimes gripping, there is very little violence and no foul language. Some students may question whether or not the information about gangs in this story can be applied to today's world, which may result in lively, interesting classroom discussions on why young people join gangs and how society can help eliminate gangs from our cities.

All references come from the Puffin Books edition of *Durango Street*, copyright 1965.

# Durango Street

## Objectives

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

1. infer about characters and events when these meanings are not explicitly stated.
2. define vocabulary words from the text.
3. define slang words and phrases in the text, and discuss the extent to which these slang terms help add verisimilitude to the story.
4. point out instances of the following uses of language in the story: personification, simile.
5. discuss this story as a coming of age novel for Rufus and relate incidents from the story illustrating the ways Rufus comes to understand the world in adult terms.
6. point out instances of foreshadowing in the text.
7. cite instances from the story to illustrate Rufus' leadership abilities.
8. identify the reasons Rufus, and other boys in similar circumstances, join gangs.
9. relate Alex's plan to break up Rufus' gang and discuss the extent to which his plan is successful.
10. point out instances of irony in the story.
11. cite incidents where the author uses descriptive imagery to create mood.
12. discuss the color red as a symbol in the story.
13. cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following theme: Fighting does not solve problems because fighting leads to more fighting.
14. cite incidents from the story to support the following statements:
  - The destructive behavior of gangs can be redirected into something positive.
  - Young people who need protection should trust the adults and authority figures in their lives and ask them for help.
  - Young men need a strong father figure, so they can develop pride and self respect.
15. discuss the extent to which this story, written in the 1960's, is relevant today.

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## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe Durango Street. How does Rufus feel when he learns his mother has moved to a house near Durango Street?
2. What is the main reason young people like Rufus join gangs? For what reasons is Rufus unable to simply walk away when gangs taunt him?
3. Discuss Rufus' relationship with his mother. Why does she seem to have given up on her son? For what reasons might she have invented the story about her relationship with Ernie Brown?
4. List three qualities of leadership found in Rufus. Cite incidents from the story to illustrate each quality. For example, Rufus is a crew leader at the detention camp. When he leaves the came, he misses managing the work crew. This incident illustrates that Rufus possesses the ability to help a group of individuals work together to accomplish a goal. He guides the work crew to work as one unit in order to finish their jobs.
5. One of the thematic concepts in this story deals with the relationship between dreams VS reality. Cite two incidents from the story that illustrate this idea.
6. Discuss the color red as a symbol in this story. Consider the following:
  - The Gassers all have red hair.
  - When Rufus joins the Moors, he is told he must take a can of red paint and paint "Moors is boss" on the wall of the police station.
7. Cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following statement: Bantu would not have remained the leader of the Moors for much longer even if Rufus had not joined the gang.
8. Why is the following statement ironic?

"You gets beat' into this gang, and you gets beat' out."

Find another example of irony in this story. Hint: Consider the advice Rufus gives to Curtis.
9. Describe Alex's plan to break up the Moors. To what extent is his plan successful?
10. Why does Rufus plan a raid on the Gassers? Briefly describe his battle plan. To what extent is he successful?

# Durango Street

## Chapter One

### Vocabulary

**commence** – begin, start

**conversed** – talked

**gambit** – an opening maneuver, action, or remark intended to gain an advantage or offer an opinion

**perplexed** – full of doubt or uncertainty; puzzled

**pronounced** – unmistakable; clearly marked

**skeptically** – unconvinced, with doubt

**vessel** – a person thought of as being the receiver or repository of some spirit or influence

1. Briefly describe Mr. Rubio and Rufus, and discuss Rufus' relationship with Mr. Rubino.

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2. Who is Baby Gibson? What secret about Rufus does Baby Gibson reveal to Mr. Rubio?

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3. List two things Rufus dislikes about Pine Valley Honor Camp.

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## Chapter Eleven

### Vocabulary

**escapade** – a reckless adventure or prank

1. Find an incident in this chapter illustrating the thematic concept of dreams VS reality.

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2. How does Mrs. Henry react to Alex Robbins' presence in Rufus' life? To what extent are you surprised by her attitude?

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3. Why does Rufus want the boys to wear dark glasses? Describe his plan to handle Alex Robbins.

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## Chapter Sixteen

### Vocabulary

**nettled** – irritated, annoyed

1. What is Rufus' Big Lawn Plan?

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2. How do the Bloods and the Aztecs respond to Rufus' plan?

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## **Chapter Twenty-Five**

1. What does Rufus plan to do with the gun?

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