

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Killing Mr. Griffin

by Lois Duncan

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Notes

The setting of this story is Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the 1970's. The characters, for the most part, are average high school students still living at home, playing sports, dating, and going the local soda shop. However, all of them have flaws in their character that make them vulnerable to the evil influence of one of their classmates.

While this is a mystery story, readers are reminded of how fragile youth are and how easily young lives can be destroyed. This story looks at peer pressure, the importance of family communication, and the consequences that can follow when “not bad people” do “bad things.”

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What does Susan's poem, "Song for Ophelia," say about her reasons for becoming entangled with Mark, David, and Betsy?
2. Support or refute the following statement about Susan: In the beginning of the story, Susan feels like an outsider in her own family and school.
3. Why does Susan think the picnic with David and his friends will probably be the happiest day of her life?
4. Write a character sketch of Mrs. Griffin. Why is she positive her husband isn't having an affair? Why does she try to keep her husband home from work that last morning before he disappears?
5. Support or refute the following statement: Mr. Griffin's tie is a symbol of his dignity and courage.
6. List the events or facts in the story that lead the reader to conclude that Mark is mentally unstable.
7. In what ways is David's life as empty as the living room in his house?
8. What is the significance of Susan's decision to remove her eyeglasses when she listens to the plan to kidnap Mr. Griffin?
9. Support the following statement about Susan's life before the kidnapping: The bird crashing into the window illustrates Susan's feeling that her life is out of control and headed for disaster.
10. How does Mr. Griffin demonstrate he truly cares about Susan's well being?
11. Do you think Mrs. Griffin's forgiving behavior toward Susan at the end of the story is believable?
12. Support that the overall theme of the novel - People must not run from their problems - applies to the following characters: Susan, David, Mr. and Mrs. Garrett
13. Sometimes in a mystery a simple object can trigger a series of life-changing events. How does Mr. Griffin's class ring change the lives of the kidnapers?

Objectives

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

1. discuss how the plot of a mystery novel must include the following elements so it is both believable and interesting:
 - characters with believable motivations
 - pertinent details in the plot to add mystery and interest
2. recognize the author's use of metaphors to illustrate the character's feelings about their lives in the following instances:
 - the bird crashing into Susan's window
 - description of David's living room
3. comment on how the flashbacks into Mark's past give the reader privileged information about his motivations, not always available to all the others in the story.
4. make inferences about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
5. discuss the following symbols in the story:
 - Susan's eyeglasses
 - Mr. Griffin's tie
 - the wind
6. recognize the author's use of foreshadowing to establish credibility and to build suspense in the story by giving the reader hints about coming actions.
7. support or refute the idea that this is a "coming-of-age" novel for the novel's protagonist.
8. discuss the power of peer pressure to influence the decisions of the characters in the story.
9. comment on the author's use of allusions.
10. support that a theme of the novel is the following: Because of emotional needs, it is all too easy for basically good people to be led into doing bad things.

Killing Mr. Griffin

CHAPTER 1

VOCABULARY

conspiratorial—characteristics of secretly planning
contemplate—consider
encasement—an enclosure
extracurricular—beyond what is necessary
farce—mockery
inaudible—without sound
irrevocably—unable to be changed
jostled—pushed through
obscured—vague
rugged—rough looking
saunter—stroll
tentatively—timidly
vehemently—vigorously
vial—small bottle

1. Briefly identify the children in the McConnell family.

2. What does Susan mean by “someday”?

3. Who is David Ruggles? How does Susan feel about him?

CHAPTER 4

VOCABULARY

irritably—touchy
perfunctory—done routinely
shrillness—screeching
squabbling—bickering

1. Why are Saturday's special for Susan?

2. Find a quotation in the chapter that illustrates the idea that Susan feels a part of the picnic group.

3. Who is Lana?

CHAPTER 9

NO VOCABULARY

1. Betsy and Susan both have fathers to turn to for help. Why do you suppose Susan wants to go to her father for help, but Betsy doesn't suggest going to her father?

2. What two things does Mark say that they need to do to be safe?

3. How does Mark convince Susan they need to bury the body?

4. How does Mark's father die?

5. What does David's father have to do with his decision to go along with Mark's plan to bury the body?

6. Why does Mark comfort Susan?
