



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

OCTOBER SKY

BY HOMER HICKAM



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ISBN 978-1-60389-272-8

Item No. 302881

Written by Diana Drew

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Autobiography****Objective:** Writing Your Autobiography**Activity**

October Sky is an autobiography of Homer (Sonny) Hickam, Jr., primarily covering three years in his life—the three years he was in grades 10 through 12 at Big Creek High School in rural West Virginia. The author is open and honest about his experiences. He writes with a sense of immediacy, thoughtfulness, and reflection, as if he were going through this period in his life right now and trying to think through the lessons he's learning. He focuses on all aspects of his life, from his home life and his schoolwork to his friends, his town, his faith, and even his pets.

Not only does he chronicle the events in his life at this time, he also describes his feelings and responses to these events. Like every good storyteller, he uses literary devices, including similes, metaphors, foreshadowing, personification, and alliteration, to bring his narrative vividly to life. This makes the book enjoyable to read and a real page-turner.

Take a few moments to consider how you would write your own autobiography. First, create an outline of your life. There's no need to mention everything that has happened to you, but be sure to include the events that have influenced you the most, and shaped your life up to this point. Look at all aspects of your life to determine which events—at home, at school, among your friends, at your house of worship—have meant the most to you. After you have completed your outline, transform it into an brief autobiography of your life. Feel free to use literary devices in your autobiographical write-up to add depth and feeling to your words.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1–5**Characterization****Objective:** Writing Sketches of Characters**Activity**

The trading card company Topps has commissioned you to design trading cards and write the flip side of the cards for the following characters from *October Sky*:

- Sonny
- Miss Riley
- Quentin
- Jake Mosby
- John Dubonnet
- Sonny's father

Using full sentences, write a short, thumbnail sketch of each one. Each of these brief write-ups should be between 100 and 200 words. You will not actually be drawing faces for characters, unless your teacher makes that one of the requirements of this activity.

Among the points to cover in your thumbnail sketches are the following:

- the character's role in *October Sky*
- a brief description of what the character looks like (this doesn't have to be long because the character will supposedly be pictured on the front of the card)
- the character's accomplishments
- the character's future goals or aspirations

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 2**Anagrams****Objective:** Finding Words Within Words**Activity**

October Sky was originally published under the title *Rocket Boys*. Interestingly, the two titles are anagrams; that is, they are spelled with exactly the same letters, rearranged into different words.

Using the letters in the book title, come up with as many words of four or more letters as you and your group can. Do not, however, take a three-letter word and add an s to make it plural.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 4–8

E-mail Messages

Objective: Summarizing

Activity

You've been enjoying reading *October Sky* so much that you want to keep a friend who lives out of state updated about what's happening in the book as you go along. You'll be sending your friend five e-mails—one for each chapter.

For chapters 4 through 8, write a two- to five-paragraph summary about what's happening in each chapter.

Each of your e-mailed summaries should include the following elements:

- what happens in the chapter
- your sense of the author's feelings about what happens
- other characters' motivations, as revealed by their words and actions
- how the action in the chapter propels the story
- whether and how the action in the chapter makes you want to read more
- how you relate what happens in the chapter to your own life

Keep in mind that e-mail is an informal means of communication, so a lighthearted, casual tone is acceptable for this activity. However, text messaging and instant messaging shorthand is not acceptable. All e-mails must be written in full sentences, with proper capitalization, grammar, and punctuation.

In the first e-mail, you should give a broad overview of what has come before chapter 4, and why what you've read so far has prompted you to write a series of e-mails about this book.

Your e-mails should show a good grasp of each chapter, and should pique the interest of the person receiving the message. You must assume that the reader has no knowledge of this book; therefore, early in the series of e-mails you should identify all the characters as they're first introduced. If a new character comes up in later e-mails, that character must be identified as well. If a town is mentioned, you should note where the town is located, including the state and the region.

You should view this activity as if the person you're writing to might want to discuss this book with someone else. The e-mails, therefore, should include as much information as possible.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 7–9

Focus Groups

Objectives: Analyzing and Critiquing the Narrative
Designing an Ad Campaign

Activity

Focus groups are a well-known way to assess how people react to a new product, a movie, a new food, even a politician's opinions on subjects—just about anything that's important or new. Focus groups meet and the participants discuss their reactions to the subject at hand in anonymity, so all members of the group feel free to express their true feelings.

The publisher of *October Sky* wants to determine if teenagers are the best prospective market for this book, and, if so, how to best advertise it among teenagers.

The publisher has hired your team to serve as a focus group to assess chapters 7 through 9. You have several tasks as part of this group, including:

Two sample questions follow. Do not, however, use these two as part of your focus group:

- What about these chapters was realistic to you?
- Why would you recommend, or not recommend, the book to a friend?

Create an ad campaign for *October Sky*, geared specifically to teenagers. Be specific in the ad campaign proposal you submit. Specify the following:

- what kind of ads you'd create (include a rough sketch, a tagline, and some copy)
- where you'd place these ads (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, Internet)
- which "benefits" of *October Sky* you would stress in your ads, and how ads placed in one medium (say, in *Teen* magazine) would be different from ads placed in another (such as a commercial for a show on young inventors on the Discovery Channel).

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 10

Create a Newspaper

Objective: Distinguishing Fact from Opinion
Writing in Various Newspaper Styles

Activity

While most “hard” news stories try to answer these questions in the first or second paragraph, “feature” or “human interest” stories may answer them throughout the piece.

News stories answer the following questions: *Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How*. This information is usually contained in the very first paragraph, with the rest of the story filling in the secondary details. Excellent journalists can put the facts in the first sentence without it appearing forced. News stories’ main purpose is to inform and educate readers, simply by stating factual information.

Human interest stories concentrate less on the facts and do not always place the 4W’s, 1H in the beginning; this type of journalism focuses more on how the story will resonate with the paper’s readers. Human interest stories deal with subjects the editors of papers feel their want to explore. These types of stories are frequently about animals, achievements, curiosities, or unusual happenings, but they can deal with almost any aspect of “human interest.” Their purpose is to entertain.

Editorials, however, take facts and develop an opinion based on the facts. The 4W’s, 1H may or may not even be in the editorial. They present information, but in a biased way. Editorials are meant to persuade readers, to have them take action on a subject, or to enlighten readers about an issue on which there are differing views.

In *October Sky*, Basil Ogelthorpe, the reporter who writes an ongoing series of stories about the Big Creek Missile Agency’s rocket launches for the *McDowell County Banner*, favors flowery language and personal impressions. His writing style is filled with superlatives and personal opinions. By contrast, traditional journalism is based on objectivity, or fact-based reporting.

In this activity, you will create an edition of a newspaper based on one of the BCMA’s rocket launches. First, the class as a whole will decide on a name for the newspaper and a slogan (for example, *West Virginia’s Source for News*), using a brainstorming approach and then choosing from among the suggestions based on a vote. Then, the class will break into smaller groups to complete the following tasks:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 11

Literary Terms

Objective: Identifying Figurative Language

Activity

Writers use figures of speech to make their prose more colorful, interesting, and evocative for readers. Figures of speech include similes (comparing two things using *like* or *as*—The sun's rays streaked across the sky like blazing pillars of fire), metaphors (comparing two things by saying that one thing is another—The sun was a huge orange fireball suspended in midair), and personification (giving human qualities to nonhuman things —The trees danced in the wind).

The author of *October Sky* uses all these figures of speech to bring his narrative vividly to life. Fill in the following chart, noting which figures of speech are being used in the specified context and what the figure of speech means in that context. The first one is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 12–16**Writing a Blog**

Objective: Summarizing
Recognizing Author's Voice and Purpose

Activity

Blogs, which are usually posted on an Internet site, are short and to the point. Each one is generally one or two paragraphs long, and focuses on key points the blogger wants to get across.

For each of these five chapters, write a blog (five in all) that you'd like to post on the school's website, summarizing each chapter and why you'd recommend *October Sky* to other students as well. (If you wouldn't recommend the book, you should explain why not in your blog.)

Your blog should be about two paragraphs long. Be sure to cover everything important that happens in the chapter and what it means in the context of what you're read so far. If new characters are introduced, specify who they are and how they relate to the author.

The second paragraph could be a short critique of the chapter, specifying why you liked or disliked it, what you found interesting or boring about it, and how the narrative voice conveyed the author's purpose in the chapter. The blog could also be something else related to *October Sky*.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 14

Outline

Objective: Outlining

Activity

Outlining is a strategy to help you organize your thoughts about what you're reading and to help you remember key points in all sorts of books. It can be equally effective in understanding and remembering fiction (that is, novels, plays, short stories, etc.) or in helping you learn from works of nonfiction, ranging from science and social studies books to history and foreign language texts.

For this chapter, you'll be creating an outline that specifies the characters in the chapter, each character's role in the chapter, the action in the chapter, the tone of the chapter, and the insights gained by the characters as a result of what they saw and did in the chapter.

Your outline should include a number of major heads, spotlighting major points, as well as indented subheads under the main points.

For example, major heads might include the following:

- Main characters
- Major events
- Insights I've gained into main characters
- How parallel story lines propel the narrative