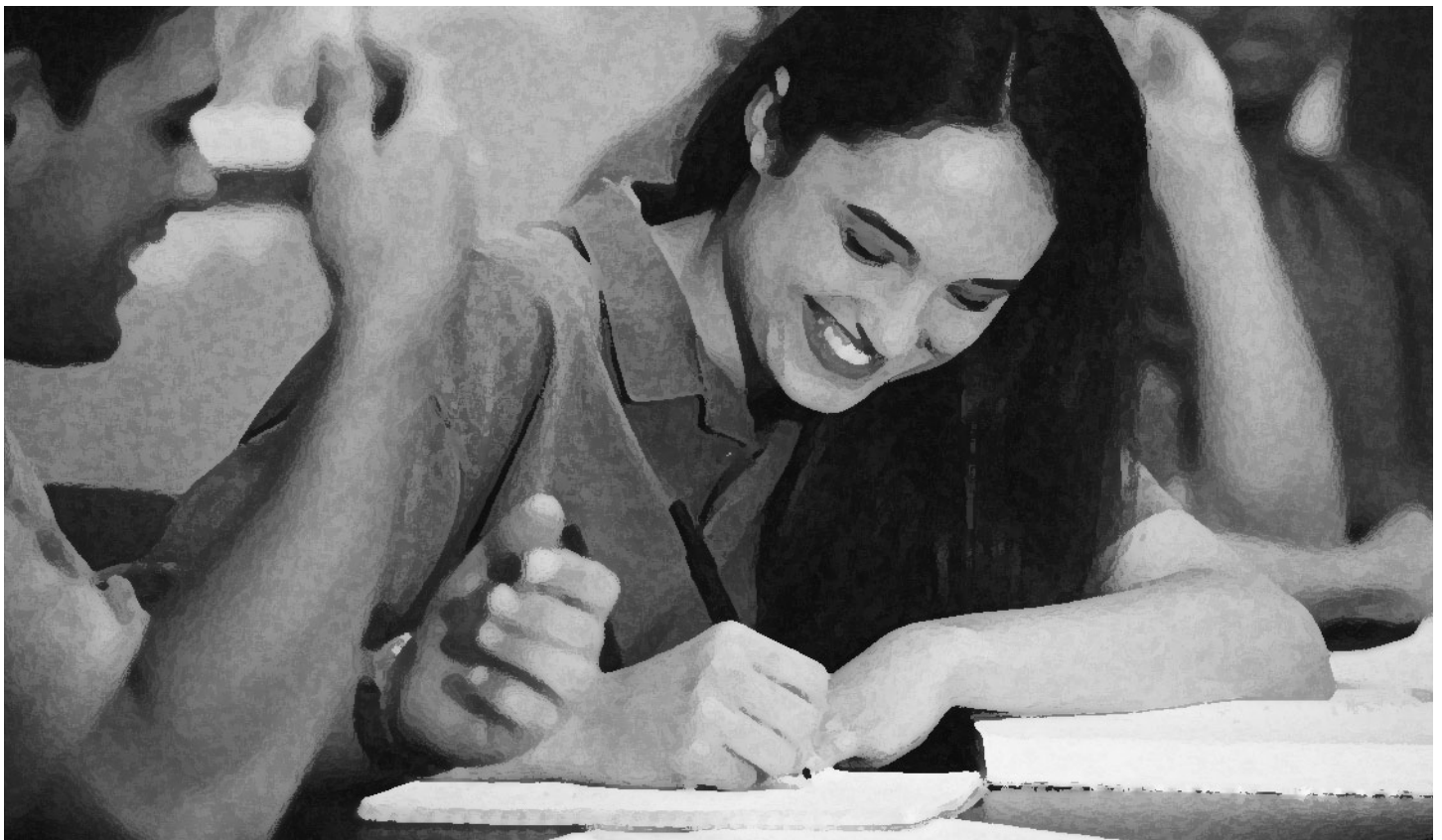


PRESTWICK HOUSE

Activity Pack

A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY

BY JOHN IRVING



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Reorder No. 201414

Written by Rebecca Challman

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-reading**Authorial Motivation**

Objective: Exploring an author's motivation for writing a literary text

Activity: Author-ized Brochure

Create a tri-fold brochure based on the life and literary works of *A Prayer for Owen Meany* author John Irving. You may use a computer program to create and print the brochure; however, all text must be original.

You must include the following information:

- Birth and family history
- Educational background
- Marriage(s) and children
- Career highlights
- Titles and timeline of other published works
- How the author's life may have influenced his work

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 1–The Foul Ball

Symbolism

Objective: Recognizing an author's use of symbolism and understanding how it lends meaning to a literary text
Applying symbolism to life

The first chapter of *A Prayer for Owen Meany* introduces a few of the many symbols in the novel. Irving skillfully uses people and objects to represent ideas and ideals. Compile a list of examples of symbolism from this chapter. Name the person or object, what each symbolizes, and how you recognized it as a symbol. Write your answers down to aid you in the activity that follows. Example: Tabitha Wheelwright—she represents an ideal of motherhood and femininity. This is revealed by Irving's descriptions of how others perceive her physical beauty and her gentle, loving spirit.

Activity: Symbolism Shape-up

Apply what you know about symbolism to select a shape that best represents your personality, perhaps a circle if you are open-minded or a trapezoid if you think of yourself as laid back. Cut out the shape from a large poster board. The content of the shape should fill an 8 1/2" by 11" space on either side. Use your knowledge of literary symbolism to select colors, pictures, and symbols illustrating your character traits and passions. These will make up the first side of your shape montage. Fill the other side of your shape with words, quotes, poems, etc. that represent your philosophy (values, ideals).

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 2–The Armadillo**Theme****Objective:** Extracting recurring ideas from a literary text**Activity: Diary Diatribe**

At the close of the second chapter, John's diary entry dated January 30, 1987, attacks the policies of then President Ronald Reagan. Reagan served as President from 1981 to 1989. Assume the identity of the present day John Wheelwright. Create five new diary entries. Include the following:

- a religious event or situation and your reaction to it
- a political event or situation and your reaction to it
- where you are living and why
- a recollection of a childhood event and its connection to the present

Remember that diary entries often focus on emotional reactions to events.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 3–The Angel**Symbolism/Motifs**

Objective: Recognizing recurring symbols and themes in a literary text
Understanding how the use of symbolism lends meaning to a literary text

Activity

In small groups, compile a list of eight to ten symbols from the novel thus far. Interpret the meaning of each symbol. Begin with the title of this chapter, and remember that each symbol may represent more than one idea.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 4–The Little Lord Jesus**Characterization/Style/Theme**

Objective: Recognizing how an author's style reinforces characterization and supports central ideas in a literary text

Activity

In a Prayer for Owen Meany, Irving uses capital letters to represent Owen's speech and writing. In some editions of the New Testament of the *Bible*, Jesus' words appear in capital letters. In other editions, his words appear in red print. Irving thus correlates Owen's words with those of Jesus, identifying him firmly as a Christ figure in the novel.

Imagine you are an author; find an original way to distinguish your protagonist from the other characters in your novel.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 5–The Ghost of the Future**Figurative Language**

Objective: Recognizing figurative language in a literary text
Using figurative language in writing

Activity: Twenty MOPS

Use the first five chapters of *A Prayer for Owen Meany* to document at least five examples of each of the following literary devices:

- Metaphor
- Onomatopoeia
- Personification
- Simile

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 6–The Voice

Ambiguity/Characterization

Objective: Recognizing how an author uses ambiguity to contrast characters

Activity

In a *Prayer for Owen Meany*, Irving clearly defines everything about Owen Meany. The reader gets a firm idea of who he is, what he believes, and how strongly he believes it. John Wheelwright, on the other hand, proves a little vague. He is reserved both as a narrator and as a character. This is especially noticeable in the passages where John narrates his life in Toronto; Owen is not present, and the passages are not as exciting. Thus, Irving uses ambiguity to make Owen stand out in stark contrast to John.

Rewrite a paragraph from this chapter in which you reverse the roles of Owen and John; Owen becomes protagonist and narrator.

“He would devise an approach to the basket; dribbling at good speed, he would time his leap to coincide with a teammate’s readiness to lift him higher—he would jump into a teammate’s waiting arms, and the teammate would (occasionally) boost Owen above the basket’s rim. I was the only one who was willing to practice the timing with him; it was such a ridiculous thing for him to want to do—for someone his size to set himself the challenge of soaring and reaching so high...it was just silliness, and I tired of the mindless, repetitive choreography.” (Pg. 303)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 8–The Finger

Characterization

Objective: Understanding how an author develops believable characters to enhance a literary text
Using drama to explore characters from a literary text

Activity: Character Actor

Select a character from *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. Write the following details; be as descriptive as possible:

- Physical characteristics—age, color of eyes, height, weight, color of hair
- Manner of dress—smart and fashionable, sloppy and uncouth, clean but poor
- Facial expressions, mannerisms, and gestures—frowning in thought, arching an eyebrow, holding hands behind the back
- Personality traits—introvert, extrovert, precocious, stoic

Prepare a ten-minute presentation that brings the character to life. Assume the character's identity. Create a costume for the character, complete with props. What makes them identifiable? Is it the way they dress? Is it their manner of speaking? Apply what you know about the character down to the finest detail. Give the class a chance to guess who you are before the presentation.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 9–The Shot**Critical Reading**

Objective: Supporting critical reading of a literary text
Exploring print journalism

Activity: Paper Roles

As a class, assume the roles of individuals working at *The Gravesend Herald*.

- Editor
- Content editor–assigns stories and column inches.
- Copy editor–proofs stories and slugs (headlines) them.
- Obituary writer
- Crime reporter
- Sports reporter
- Special interest reporter
- Style reporter–reports light hearted fare.
- Layout and design person–responsible for laying the stories and visuals out in order to catch the reader's eye and hold it.
- Photographer–must provide photographs or visuals to accompany the articles.
- Sports photographer–must provide photographs or visuals to accompany the sports articles.

Rely only on information from *A Prayer for Owen Meany* for article content. Use a computer program to publish one issue of *The Gravesend Herald*.