

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

*The Watsons Go to
Birmingham—1963*

by Christopher Paul Curtis

Copyright © 2001 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for
classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. *This material,
in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.*

ISBN: 978-1-58049-965-1

Item No. 200927

And You Wonder Why We Get Called the Weird Watsons

1. This chapter introduces all the members of the Watson family in their freezing-cold living room in Flint, Michigan. Daniel and Wilona Watson are the parents of thirteen year old Byron, ten year old Kenny, and their little sister, Joetta. As they try to keep warm, their father entertains them with his family stories. The Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, has written that, “All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Do you think the Watson family is a happy or an unhappy one? Choose and write six sentences from this chapter to prove your opinion. Be sure to put quotation marks when you begin and end the sentences you quote from in the chapter.
2. Usually authors choose to write their novels from the point of view of one character. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* is written in the first person, from Kenny’s point of view. All that happens, and all the behavior of the characters is seen and judged through Kenny’s eyes. Write the last paragraph of the chapter as if were written from the point of view of Mrs. Watson instead of Kenny’s.
3. Kenny’s relationship to his brother Byron comes across clearly in this chapter. Suppose you have a best friend who does not have a brother. Write an imaginary conversation you might have with him about the good and bad points of having a brother. You may use Kenny and Byron’s relationship, one from real life, or one from a television series as the basis for your opinion.

Response Journal

4. The scene where Byron gets his lip stuck to the frozen car mirror is hilarious. Why do you suppose we can find something so funny when we are, at the same time, feeling sympathy for the pain being caused? Write an imaginary letter to your cousin telling him or her about something which happened that was painful and funny at the same time. The incident can be from real life or something you recall from a film or television program.

5. Kenny decides to tease Byron by calling him “The Lipless Wonder.” Byron teases Kenny back by making “his eyes go crossed.” Being teased can sometimes hurt. It can also lead to unforeseen and unpleasant consequences if and when the person being teased retaliates. Choose one of the following questions to answer:
 - A. What action would you take if you were a parent and two of your children teased each other?

 - B. What action would you take if you were a teacher and two of your students teased each other?

Give My Regards to Clark, Poindexter

6. Kenny does not seem to have too easy a life with his schoolmates and his troublesome brother Byron. Kenny, however, has a way of telling about the things that frighten him in a quite humorous way. Think back to a time at school when something unpleasant happened to you or someone you know. Write about the incident in the most humorous way you can in an imaginary letter to your favorite cousin, who lives in another state.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963

7. In this chapter Kenny tells about a time he read from the works of Langston Hughes, the very fine African-American poet, to Mr. Alums's fifth grade class. Here is a poem which Langston Hughes wrote which might describe the feelings of Kenny and many others. Write what you think the meaning of it is.

Still Here
I been scared and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
 Snow has friz me,
 Sun has baked me,
Looks like between 'em they done
 Tried to make me
Stop laughin', stop lovin', 'stop livin'—
 But I don't care!
 I'm still here!

8. Kenny loves to read and is very good at it. He is singled out to read to Mr. Alums' class even though at the time he is only a second grader, which embarrasses Kenny. He felt that being able to read so well "...made me enemies with some of the other kids..." Why do you suppose Kenny is made to feel that there is something wrong with being smart and being able to read so well? Include in your answer whether, in your opinion, that is true in your school.
9. The new boy and his brother are picked on as soon as they get on the school bus. This is because of their "real down-South accent" and their raggedy clothes. This leads to Kenny thinking a miracle is happening to him. Write a diary entry that Kenny might have written which would explain his feeling about this, and also why the arrival of the new boys means he is "saved."

Response Journal

10. Driving a school bus is not an easy job. The day the new boys ride the bus, Larry Dunn hits them with an apple core. This infuriates the bus driver. He quickly gets Larry Dunn under control with a few chosen words. Think back to a time something memorable (good or bad) happened when you were riding the school bus. Write about it as an imaginary conversation you might have had about it with your family over dinner that evening.

The World's Greatest Dinosaur War Ever

11. In this chapter, we see the difference between country life and city life clearly explained. Before coming to Flint, Rufus and Cody had used guns, and they and their family had eaten the squirrels they shot. How do you suppose you would adjust if you were put into an environment completely different than the one you had known all your life? Choose one of the following questions to answer in a paragraph.
- A. You are a city boy or girl and your parents or guardian decide they'd rather have a life on a farm than stay in the city any longer. What would your feelings be, and why?
 - B. You've lived all of your life, like Rufus and Cody, in a mostly rural area. What do you think you would miss most about country life and dislike most about city life?
12. Kenny has an uneasy relationship with his only friend, LJ Jones. It is easy to see that LJ is taking advantage of being Kenny's only friend. LJ steals a few of Kenny's dinosaurs each time they play with them. Having gotten away with that, even though Kenny knew that LJ is doing it, LJ gets bolder in his thieving. He tricks Kenny and steals almost all of his dinosaurs. Considering the fact that LJ is really not a friend to Kenny at all, what advice would you give to Kenny if you learned about what LJ had been doing?

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963

13. Larry Dunn ridicules the poverty of Rufus and Cody to everyone on the school bus. It is particularly hurtful for Rufus to have his little brother, Cody, made fun of. To make matters worse, Kenny joins in the laughter. Rufus feels that Kenny has shown himself not to be a loyal friend and withdraws from the friendship. Kenny misses his friend, but does not know what to do. Mrs. Watson comes to the rescue. Relate a time when you or someone you know hurt a person's feelings thoughtlessly, and then didn't know what to do about it? Tell how the matter was finally resolved.
14. Even though it is not stated in so many words, the impression is given that Rufus and Cody do not get enough to eat. Mrs. Watson, from things Kenny tells her about the boys, realizes this and packs extra food in Kenny's lunch for them. Suppose you were Rufus' or Cody's teacher and found out that they weren't getting enough to eat. Write up a plan of what you would do to make sure they and their family had enough food.
15. This chapter tells much about friendship. Choose one of the following ways to tell what your feelings about friendship are.
 - A. Write a four to six line poem about friendship.
Or:
 - B. Make a list of six things you feel make a person a good friend.

Froze-Up Southern Folks

16. Byron's tall tale explanation of their mother's reason for bundling Kenny and Joetta up in so many clothes in winter is imaginative. He scares them with his story of thin Southern blood, garbage trucks, and frozen bodies. Finally, when he had made Joetta cry with fright, he leaves them to play truant from school. What is your reaction to Byron's behavior toward his little sister in scaring her this way? If Mr. or Mrs. Watson knew about this, what do you think they would do to Byron?