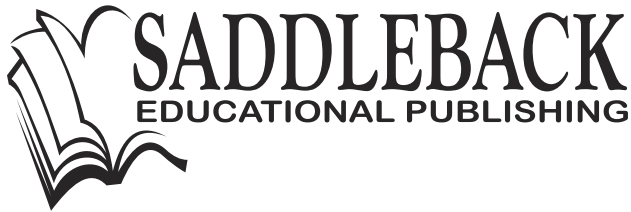


# *Focus* **ON READING**

*Dacey's  
Song*

**JOSH BRACKETT**

**This is a sample not intended for classroom use.**



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# Introduction/Classroom Management

## WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

*Focus on Reading* literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

*Focus on Reading* is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

## USING *FOCUS ON READING*

*Focus on Reading* is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

## Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

**Vocabulary Words to Know** lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

**Things to Know** identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

**Questions to Think About** helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

## During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

**Check Your Understanding: Short Answer** contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

## After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

*Focus on Reading* is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

**Deepen Your Understanding** is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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## Synopsis

*Dacey's Song* is the second book of Cynthia Voigt's series about the Tillerman family. Dacey Tillerman, having heroically led her younger siblings, James, Maybeth, and Sammy, out of homelessness to the home of their grandmother, Abigail Tillerman, must now face the challenges of a more-or-less normal life in a poor farmhouse in Crisfield, Maryland: school, chores, rural life, making friends, growing up, and bringing closure to her relationship with her absent mother, who is mentally and physically ill.

Although James does well in school, the other children face challenges of their own. Maybeth seems to be learning disabled, although she has exceptional ability in music. Sammy has a history of behavioral problems.

Other characters include Mr. Lingerle, the fat and lonely music teacher, who takes a special interest in Maybeth; Jeff, who attracts Dacey with his guitar playing and singing but whose attentions she hesitates to accept; Millie, the proprietor of the grocery store where Dacey works after school; and Mina, Dacey's schoolmate who reaches out to her in friendship across racial lines.

## About the Author

Cynthia Voigt, who has written many books for middle-school-aged children, was born in Boston, grew up in Connecticut, and lived and taught high school English in Maryland. Now she lives on an island off the coast of Maine.

Voigt says about her own work, "I don't consider myself a good storyteller, and I have no burning stories to tell. I have no solutions to the problems of the world. I think there are solutions for individual people and individual circumstances. My writing is my way of saying, 'Have you looked at it this way?' I do it. I enjoy it. It's a razzle-dazzle kind of fun to have."

She says that Dacey Tillerman is the child that she would have liked to have been and Gram is the lady that she would like to become.

Voigt's first novel in the Tillerman family series, *Homecoming*, was nominated for an American Book Award in 1982. *Dacey's Song* won the 1983 Newbery Award.

Other books in the Tillerman family series include *A Solitary Blue*, *The Runner*, *Sons from Afar*, and *Seventeen Against the Dealer*.

## Background of the Story

*Homecoming*, the first book in Cynthia Voigt's Tillerman series, begins in a small town in northeastern Connecticut when Liza Tillerman tells her four children to stay in the car while she goes into a shopping mall. She tells the three young children to listen to Dacey, the oldest. Liza never comes back.

Dacey realizes that if they stay in the car in the parking lot, they will be found by the police and placed in foster homes. She leads them away on foot, with only a few dollars, a bag of peanut butter sandwiches, and a map.

Together, the children walk and hitchhike to Bridgeport, a city in southwestern Connecticut, sleeping in abandoned houses and state parks and eating stale doughnuts, fruit, and milk. Bridgeport is where they hope to find Aunt Cilla, an elderly aunt who used to send an annual Christmas card. When they get there, they find that Aunt Cilla is dead. They are taken in by Cousin Eunice.

Eunice, however, wants to split up the family. To avoid that, they set out for Crisfield, Maryland, to the home of their mother's mother, Abigail Tillerman, whom they have never met. With the help of Will Hawkins, the owner of a small circus, they arrive and are accepted, if somewhat coldly at first.

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## Focus Your Knowledge

- Locate the following places on a map of the United States: Provincetown, Massachusetts; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Crisfield, Maryland; Salisbury, Maryland; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts. About how far is it from Provincetown to Crisfield? This is how far the Tillermans traveled to get to their grandmother's house.
- Can you recall a time when your parent or guardian left you somewhere and did not come back to get you as soon as you expected? What thoughts and feelings did you have?
- Can you recall a time when you were responsible for the care of one or more younger children? What concerns did you have?
- Have you ever been the new kid at school? Or have you ever befriended a new classmate? What was that experience like?
- The children in this story live with their grandmother. How is living with a grandparent different from living with a parent?
- How do you define *family*? What makes a group of people a family? Is there more than one "picture" of what a family looks like?

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## Focus Your Reading

### Vocabulary Words to Know

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Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

**crucial**—vitaly important; immediately necessary

**fallow**—with nothing growing; unplanted

**barren**—not capable of growing anything

**grubby**—dirty; grimy

**hazel**—light brown to strong yellowish brown

**tote**—to carry by hand; to haul

**mottled**—having colored spots or blotches

**flattery**—insincere praise

**theory**—a thought or belief based on facts

**resolved**—found an answer to; made clear or understandable

### Things to Know

---

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

**The Chesapeake Bay** is an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. It is in Virginia and Maryland and is about two hundred miles long.

A **marsh** is a grassy wetland ecosystem between land and a body of water, such as an ocean, a river, or a lake.

**Gunwales** are the upper edges of a ship's or boat's side; pronounced "gunnels."

**Turpentine** is a solvent and paint thinner.

**This is a sample not intended for classroom use.**



## Focus Your Reading

### Questions to Think About

---

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. In Chapter 1 of *Dacey's Song*, what do you learn about each of the Tillerman children?
2. What do you learn about the children's lives before this story starts?
3. What do you learn about Gram?
4. How does Dacey feel about responsibility?
5. How does Dacey feel about growing up?

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## Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. "There were still things to worry about here, but nothing **crucial**."

crucial: \_\_\_\_\_

2. "Sammy was out back, on the other side of the old farmhouse, spading up **fallow** land to increase the size of the vegetable garden."

fallow: \_\_\_\_\_

3. "So except for the children's bicycles, the overgrown tracks that led off from the front of the house, through a stand of pines and between two long **barren** fields to the road, were unmarked."

barren: \_\_\_\_\_

4. "When she got around back, Sammy had taken the extra bag with his **grubby** arms."

grubby: \_\_\_\_\_

5. "Yet all the Tillermans had **hazel** eyes."

hazel: \_\_\_\_\_

6. "Millie might be **lazy**, she might just be too tired (and Dicey guessed if she had to **tote** that body around every day, all day long, she'd get tired too), or she might just not care."

tote: \_\_\_\_\_

7. "Dicey stared at the woman, at the heavy **mottled** flesh of her face."

mottled: \_\_\_\_\_

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8. "You're a good butcher," Dicey said, trying a little **flattery**. "Gram says so."

flattery: \_\_\_\_\_

9. "You see," Dicey spoke urgently, "my **theory** is that your business will get better, and so instead of costing you money, I'd be making you money."

theory: \_\_\_\_\_

10. "Gram's expression **resolved** itself into amusement."

resolved: \_\_\_\_\_

# Check Your Understanding

## Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. Who paints the barn?
  - a. Dicey
  - b. Gram
  - c. James
2. Who is behind in school?
  - a. James
  - b. Maybeth
  - c. Sammy
3. What worry was a constant for the Tillerman children until they arrived at Gram's?
  - a. getting enough food
  - b. finding shelter
  - c. their mother's illness
4. Where does Dicey want to work?
  - a. at a grocery store
  - b. at a toy store
  - c. at a boat shop
5. Who is sick and may not get better?
  - a. Gram
  - b. Maybeth
  - c. Momma (Liza Tillerman)
6. Who has musical talent?
  - a. James
  - b. Maybeth
  - c. Sammy
7. Who likes to read?
  - a. James
  - b. Maybeth
  - c. Sammy
8. Why does Dicey find it difficult to think in home ec class?
  - a. She has to actually do things in class.
  - b. She needs to learn to sew.
  - c. The teacher is always explaining things.
9. Who plays checkers with Gram?
  - a. James
  - b. Maybeth
  - c. Sammy
10. Where does Gram write the children's names?
  - a. in the family photo album
  - b. in the family Bible
  - c. on the census forms

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## Check Your Understanding

### Short Answer

---

Write a short answer for each question.

1. How would you describe Gram's house?
2. Why does Gram consider adopting her grandchildren?
3. Why does Gram decide to apply for welfare?
4. How does Gram feel about going on welfare?
5. Why can't Dicey's mother take care of her children?
6. What fairy-tale ending does Dicey doubt will come true for the Tillermans?
7. What does the sailboat mean to Dicey?
8. How does Dicey feel about her developing body?
9. What is Dicey's argument for why Millie should hire her?
10. Why is Dicey surprised that Maybeth's music teacher has asked for a conference?

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## *Deepen Your Understanding*

Chapter 1 describes how the characters in the book spend an evening at home. How is what they do similar to or different from the way you and your family spend a typical evening at home? What feelings does the description of the Tillermans' evening bring up for you? Explain.

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