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Great Works

Instructional Guides
for Literature

M.C. Higgins, the Great

Virginia Hamilton



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How to Use This Literature Guide

Today's standards demand rigor and relevance in the reading of complex texts. The units in this series guide teachers in a rich and deep exploration of worthwhile works of literature for classroom study. The most rigorous instruction can also be interesting and engaging!

Many current strategies for effective literacy instruction have been incorporated into these instructional guides for literature. Throughout the units, text-dependent questions are used to determine comprehension of the book as well as student interpretation of the vocabulary words. The books chosen for the series are complex exemplars of carefully crafted works of literature. Close reading is used throughout the units to guide students toward revisiting the text and using textual evidence to respond to prompts orally and in writing. Students must analyze the story elements in multiple assignments for each section of the book. All of these strategies work together to rigorously guide students through their study of literature.

The next few pages will make clear how to use this guide for a purposeful and meaningful literature study. Each section of this guide is set up in the same way to make it easier for you to implement the instruction in your classroom.

Theme Thoughts

The great works of literature used throughout this series have important themes that have been relevant to people for many years. Many of the themes will be discussed during the various sections of this instructional guide. However, it would also benefit students to have independent time to think about the key themes of the novel.

Before students begin reading, have them complete *Pre-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 13). This graphic organizer will allow students to think about the themes outside the context of the story. They'll have the opportunity to evaluate statements based on important themes and defend their opinions. Be sure to have students keep their papers for comparison to the *Post-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 64). This graphic organizer is similar to the pre-reading activity. However, this time, students will be answering the questions from the point of view of one of the characters of the novel. They have to think about how the character would feel about each statement and defend their thoughts. To conclude the activity, have students compare what they thought about the themes before they read the novel to what the characters discovered during the story.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Vocabulary

Each teacher overview page has definitions and sentences about how key vocabulary words are used in the section. These words should be introduced and discussed with students. There are two student vocabulary activity pages in each section. On the first page, students are asked to define the ten words chosen by the author of this unit. On the second page in most sections, each student will select at least eight words that he or she finds interesting or difficult. For each section, choose one of these pages for your students to complete. With either assignment, you may want to have students get into pairs to discuss the meanings of the words. Allow students to use reference guides to define the words. Monitor students to make sure the definitions they have found are accurate and relate to how the words are used in the text.

On some of the vocabulary student pages, students are asked to answer text-related questions about the vocabulary words. The following question stems will help you create your own vocabulary questions if you'd like to extend the discussion.

- How does this word describe _____'s character?
- In what ways does this word relate to the problem in this story?
- How does this word help you understand the setting?
- In what ways is this word related to the story's solution?
- Describe how this word supports the novel's theme of
- What visual images does this word bring to your mind?
- For what reasons might the author have chosen to use this particular word?

At times, more work with the words will help students understand their meanings. The following quick vocabulary activities are a good way to further study the words.

- Have students practice their vocabulary and writing skills by creating sentences and/or paragraphs in which multiple vocabulary words are used correctly and with evidence of understanding.
- Students can play vocabulary concentration. Students make a set of cards with the words and a separate set of cards with the definitions. Then, students lay the cards out on the table and play concentration. The goal of the game is to match vocabulary words with their definitions.
- Students can create word journal entries about the words. Students choose words they think are important and then describe why they think each word is important within the novel.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Analyzing the Literature

After students have read each section, hold small-group or whole-class discussions. Questions are written at two levels of complexity to allow you to decide which questions best meet the needs of your students. The Level 1 questions are typically less abstract than the Level 2 questions. Level 1 is indicated by a square, while Level 2 is indicated by a triangle. These questions focus on the various story elements, such as character, setting, and plot. Student pages are provided if you want to assign these questions for individual student work before your group discussion. Be sure to add further questions as your students discuss what they've read. For each question, a few key points are provided for your reference as you discuss the novel with students.

Reader Response

In today's classrooms, there are often great readers who are below average writers. So much time and energy is spent in classrooms getting students to read on grade level, that little time is left to focus on writing skills. To help teachers include more writing in their daily literacy instruction, each section of this guide has a literature-based reader response prompt. Each of the three genres of writing is used in the reader responses within this guide: narrative, informative/explanatory, and argument. Students have a choice between two prompts for each reader response. One response requires students to make connections between the reading and their own lives. The other prompt requires students to determine text-to-text connections or connections within the text.

Close Reading the Literature

Within each section, students are asked to closely reread a short section of text. Since some versions of the novels have different page numbers, the selections are described by chapter and location, along with quotations to guide the readers. After each close reading, there are text-dependent questions to be answered by students.

Encourage students to read each question one at a time and then go back to the text and discover the answer. Work with students to ensure that they use the text to determine their answers rather than making unsupported inferences. Once students have answered the questions, discuss what they discovered. Suggested answers are provided in the answer key.

How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

Close Reading the Literature *(cont.)*

The generic, open-ended stems below can be used to write your own text-dependent questions if you would like to give students more practice.

- Give evidence from the text to support
- Justify your thinking using text evidence about
- Find evidence to support your conclusions about
- What text evidence helps the reader understand . . . ?
- Use the book to tell why _____ happens.
- Based on events in the story,
- Use text evidence to describe why

Making Connections

The activities in this section help students make cross-curricular connections to writing, mathematics, science, social studies, or the fine arts. Each of these types of activities requires higher-order thinking skills from students.

Creating with the Story Elements

It is important to spend time discussing the common story elements in literature. Understanding the characters, setting, and plot can increase students' comprehension and appreciation of the story. If teachers discuss these elements daily, students will more likely internalize the concepts and look for the elements in their independent reading. Another important reason for focusing on the story elements is that students will be better writers if they think about how the stories they read are constructed.

Students are given three options for working with the story elements. They are asked to create something related to the characters, setting, or plot of the novel. Students are given a choice on this activity so that they can decide to complete the activity that most appeals to them. Different multiple intelligences are used so that the activities are diverse and interesting to all students.

Analyzing the Literature

Provided below are discussion questions you can use in small groups, with the whole class, or for written assignments. Each question is given at two levels so you can choose the right question for each group of students. Activity sheets with these questions are provided (pages 18–19) if you want students to write their responses. For each question, a few key discussion points are provided for your reference.

Story Element	■ Level 1	▲ Level 2	Key Discussion Points
Character	Why does M.C. keep his friendship with Ben Killburn a secret?	What does M.C.'s secret friendship with Ben tell you about his father? Do you think the attitudes about the Killburns are fair? Why or why not?	The Killburns are called “witchy” people and locals are suspicious of them. Jones believes the legends and would not want his son playing with a Killburn, so the boys keep their friendship secret. Discuss how people can fear those who have different customs or who look different.
Setting	Describe Sarah's Mountain and the area near it.	How does M.C. feel about Sarah's Mountain? Why is it special to him?	The mountain sits in a lovely, green, undeveloped area near the Ohio River. Recently, a mining company stripped the summit of the mountain. Other nearby hills also have coal seams cut across them. Sarah's Mountain is named for M.C.'s great-grandmother. His family has lived there for generations.
Plot	Why is Mr. Lewis important to M.C.?	Describe M.C.'s mixed emotions about Mr. Lewis and his purpose in coming to see M.C.'s mother.	Lewis will record M.C.'s mother singing. M.C. hopes this will entice his family to move away before the spoil slides. But M.C. also fears the outside world. He worries about his mother leaving, and about how the family would survive a big change.
Character	What goes wrong when Jones and M.C. are playing together in chapter 3?	Explain why Jones says, “. . . because of that pole you think you are some M.C. Higgins, the Great!”	Jones hurts M.C. when he jumps him and squeezes too hard. M.C. is getting to be almost as strong as his father and they are competitive with each other. Jones points out that just because M.C. can swim and climb the pole, he's not that great—his dad taught him. He seems threatened by M.C.

Analyzing the Literature

Directions: Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. Why does M.C. keep his friendship with Ben Killburn a secret?

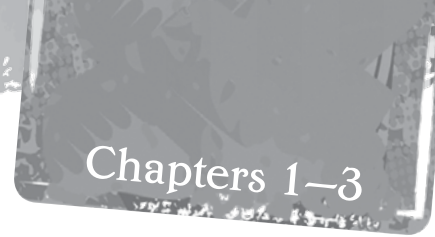
2. Describe Sarah’s Mountain and the area near it.

3. Why is Mr. Lewis important to M.C.?

4. What goes wrong when Jones and M.C. are playing together in chapter 3?

Name _____

Date _____



Analyzing the Literature

Directions: Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. What does M.C.'s secret friendship with Ben tell you about his father? Do you think the attitudes about the Killburns are fair? Why or why not?

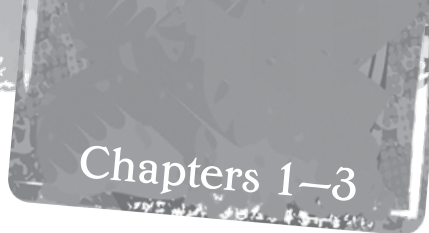
2. How does M.C. feel about Sarah's Mountain? Why is it special to him?

3. Describe M.C.'s mixed emotions about Mr. Lewis and his purpose in coming to see M.C.'s mother.

4. Explain why Jones says, "... because of that pole you think you are some M.C. Higgins, the Great!"

Name _____

Date _____



Close Reading the Literature

Directions: Closely reread the first eight paragraphs of chapter 2, ending with, “I’m all alone,” M.C. thought.” Read each question and then revisit the text to find evidence that supports your answer.

1. According to the text, what is M.C. doing with his feet while swinging on the pole? Why does he eventually stop?

2. What can M.C. see from atop the pole?

3. Describe how high the pole is. Describe where it is placed. Based on the text, what impact does its placement have?

4. What observation does M.C. make about the people he can see walking the hill paths?

Name _____

Date _____

Creating with the Story Elements

Directions: Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you've read so far. Be creative and have fun!

Characters

Create a Venn diagram that compares M.C. and his father. Think about how they behave with each other in chapter 3. Include at least three differences and three similarities in your diagram.

Setting

Imagine having a pole to sit on in your backyard or on the building where you live. What could you see looking out over your neighborhood? Draw a picture. Label what you can see.

Plot

A cliffhanger is a point in a story where you're not sure what is going to happen next. What is the cliffhanger in this novel so far? Draw a cliff (or an outcropping as described in the book). Label the drawing with the event that sets up the cliffhanger. Then, write three or more ways that the story could progress from there.