

# A TEACHER'S CURRICULUM GUIDE to the books of **WATT KEY**

FOR  
USE WITH  
COMMON CORE  
STATE  
STANDARDS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**WATT KEY** grew up in Alabama and lives there now with his wife and children. He was the oldest of seven children and spent much of his childhood outdoors, fishing and trapping with his siblings. As a child, he loved books and storytelling and began writing his own stories by the age of ten. *Alabama Moon* was his first published book, and he's written four other young adult novels. His books have won many awards, including Time Magazine's One of the 100 Best Young Adult Books of All Time and ALA's Best Books for Young Adults for *Alabama Moon*. Visit Watt online at [wattkey.com](http://wattkey.com).

## ABOUT THE BOOKS

Watt Key's middle-grade books take place in Alabama and Mississippi. In each one, the main character faces issues of survival, belonging, dealing with evil, and finding his place in the world. While all students will enjoy these coming of age stories, they are particularly appealing to boys.

## ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide supports the use of Watt Key's books as part of a standards-based curriculum. Specifically, it is designed to help students comprehend complex texts, ask questions, expand their vocabulary, participate in discussions, and cite specific evidence to support their oral or written interpretations of a text. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy has identified these as descriptors of students who are college and career ready. Questions and activities are aligned to the four CCSS ELA strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. These strands are all interconnected. Student discussion supports reading comprehension and effective written responses. Language skills and vocabulary support each of the strands. The guide provides an introduction to each book and CCSS-aligned questions and activities for during and after reading. The Extending Learning section at the end applies to all of Watt Key's books and provides opportunities for students to make connections between them. **The standards listed throughout the guide reflect the standards for grade 6, but activities can be applied to grades 5 through 8.**

There are many ways to use Watt Key's books in your classroom. They are ideal for literature circles, partner reading, and independent reading. Students should use reading notebooks to respond to questions and activities and keep track of new vocabulary. They should always support their thinking and responses by citing specific evidence from the text. During discussions, they should listen respectfully to the ideas of others and modify their thinking if necessary. It is helpful to have discussion routines in place such as "turn and talk," "think-pair-share," or Socratic seminars.

This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. You are the expert on your students' needs, so feel free to adapt it as needed for your classroom. We hope you and your students enjoy Watt Key's exciting books!



Farrar Straus Giroux



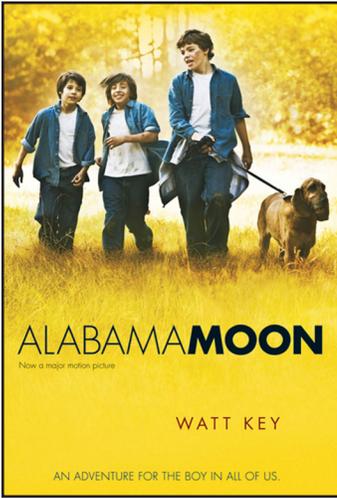
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PB 9780312644802 • PB 9780312384289  
Ages 10–14

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Ten-year-old Moon lives with his father in a shelter deep in an Alabama forest. His father teaches Moon how to survive on his own and tells him that they have no need for other people. When his father dies, Moon is alone in the world. He decides to follow his father's last instructions and go to Alaska to find other people who live like they do. But Moon doesn't get very far and soon encounters problems in the outside world. He becomes property of the state and must use the skills he has to survive and adapt to a community that's foreign to him. Along the way, he meets people who want to harm him and others who want to befriend him. And most troubling of all, he begins to doubt the things his father had taught him and wonders where he truly belongs.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### CHAPTERS 1 TO 15:

1. Why does Moon's father choose to live in isolation? Does Moon share these feelings?
2. Why does Moon decide to set out for Alaska? Is this a realistic plan? Explain your answer.
3. Do you think Mr. Abroscotto and Mr. Wellington have Moon's best interests at heart when they call in the authorities? Why or why not?
4. What words would you use to describe Constable Sanders? How does Sanders confirm Moon's father's ideas about the government?
5. How do the other boys treat Moon when he arrives at the Pinson boys' home? Why do you think they act this way?

### CHAPTERS 16 TO 37:

1. What is Moon's plan for breaking out of Pinson? Why do you think Kit and Hal choose to stay with Moon when the other boys decide to return to the school?
2. How does Moon help Kit and Hal to survive in the forest? What does Moon learn about his friends' lives before they arrived at Pinson?
3. Why does Hal decide to return to civilization? What challenges do Moon and Kit face in the forest?
4. Why does Moon take Kit to the highway? What promise does he give Kit before he leaves him?
5. Why does Moon risk getting caught by Sanders to go see Mr. Abroscotto? Why does he think Mr. Abroscotto isn't his friend?

### CHAPTERS 38 TO 51:

1. Why do you think Sanders hates Moon so much? How does Sanders turn public opinion against Moon?
2. Have Moon's survival skills prepared him for dealing with the outside world? Explain your answer.
3. How does Moon's first night in the Tuscaloosa jail represent the lowest point in his life?
4. How does Mr. Wellington convince the judge that Sanders is lying? How does Hal help Moon's defense?
5. At the end of the story, Moon tells Uncle Mike, "I'm gonna be fine. You don't need to worry about me." Do you think he's right? Explain your thinking.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### *Alabama Moon*: Book and Movie Analysis

After students have read the book, have them view the film version of *Alabama Moon*. Ask them to write a brief review comparing and contrasting the two versions and analyzing the techniques the author and filmmaker used to develop and enhance the plot, characterization, and setting. When completed have students post their reviews on a Watt Key classroom blog or bulletin board and respond to the entries of others.

## Written Response

Remind students that a theme is the main idea or underlying meaning in a piece of fiction, expressing a view about life and how people behave, and that a text may have multiple themes. Then, with the class, generate a list of ideas that are explored in *Alabama Moon*, e.g., good vs. evil; isolation vs. the need for others; the individual vs. society; survival; and coming-of-age. Have students determine what they feel is the central theme of this novel and write an essay analyzing its development during the course of the story. Make sure they include a summary of the text in their analysis.

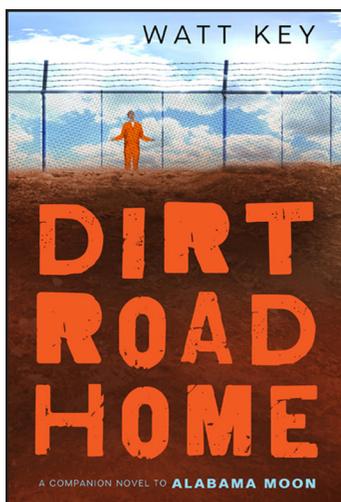
CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.RL.6.7 Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.6.9a Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics”).



HC 9780374308636 • PB 9780312674359  
Ages 10–14

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In this companion book to *Alabama Moon*, fourteen-year-old Hal Mitchell is sent to live in the Hellenweiler Boys’ Home, a gritty juvenile facility where two gangs of boys have frequent violent altercations. Each gang wants Hal to join it, but Hal has made a promise to his father to stay out of trouble so that he can be released early. Hal struggles to stay in no-man’s-land but finds it harder and harder as the threats and attacks by gang members escalate. It becomes clear that the adults in charge are not interested in protecting Hal and are creating false reports about his behavior. With the grudging help of two other boys, Hal sets out to expose the corruption at the facility and to clear his name so he can return home to his father. This is a story about courage, justice, and second chances.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### CHAPTERS 1 TO 19:

1. Why does Hal feel the Hellenweiler Boys’ Home is like a prison? How does Superintendent Fraley describe Hellenweiler to Hal? How are both analogies accurate?
2. What do Hal and his father promise each other when Hal goes to Hellenweiler? Why is it hard for Hal to keep up his end of the bargain?
3. How do tensions build when Hal refuses to join either gang? What advice does he get from Paco?
4. What happens in the boiler room? How does this lead to the gang fight?
5. What do we learn about Hal’s background in Chapter 19? How has his past contributed to his ending up in Hellenweiler?

### CHAPTERS 20 TO 39:

1. What does Paco tell Hal about the adults who run Hellenweiler? Why do they encourage violence in the boys?
2. How do Mr. Fraley and the guards try to prevent Hal from going home?
3. How does Hal’s memory of being lost in the Talladega Forest give him the confidence to fight the injustice of his situation? What happens to destroy his confidence?
4. What is Hal’s plan for finding proof of the corruption at Hellenweiler? Why does Paco agree to help him?
5. How have their experiences at Hellenweiler changed Paco and Caboose? Do you think they will be able to rebuild their lives at the end? Why or why not?

# COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

## Setting

Ask students to analyze how the setting of the book, the Hellenweiler Boys' Home, influences plot and character development. When completed, have students post their entries on a Watt Key classroom blog or bulletin board and respond to the entries of others.

## Written Response

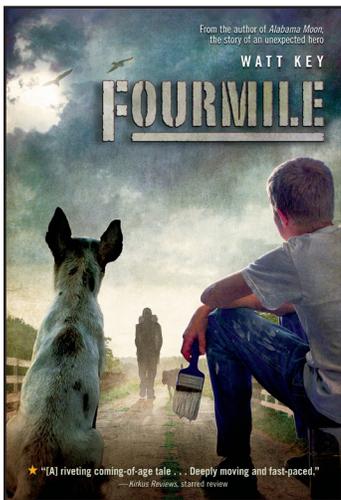
After students have read *Alabama Moon* and *Dirt Road Home* have them respond to the following prompt: Hal struggles to survive in both *Alabama Moon* and *Dirt Road Home*. How are his struggles in each story similar and different? In which book does he face the greatest challenge? Ask students to provide evidence from each text to support their answer.

CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

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HC 9780374350956 • PB 9781250039958  
Ages 9–12

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Foster lives with his mother on Fourmile, their Alabama farm. Foster is still struggling with the death of his father the previous year and the knowledge that he and his mother will have to sell Fourmile and go live in Montgomery. To complicate matters, Foster's mother is dating Dax Ganey, a man Foster knows is deceitful and bad for her. When a mysterious stranger, Gary, arrives at the farm, Foster bonds with him and looks up to him, unknowingly trying to fill his father's place in his life. When Foster's mother spurns Dax, he becomes a dangerous enemy to Foster, Gary, and her. Eventually, Foster must face both Dax and his fears and come to terms with a new life that does not include Fourmile.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### CHAPTERS 1 TO 22:

1. Why are Foster and his mother in danger of losing Fourmile? How does his mother's boyfriend, Dax, add to Foster's unhappiness?
2. How does Foster's life change when Gary arrives at the farm? How is Gary a mysterious figure?
3. On page 78, Foster says, "Everybody was moving on while I was stopped." What does he mean by this?
4. Why do you think Foster likes spending time with Gary? Why is Foster's mother afraid of his getting too close?
5. Why does the picnic at the creek make Foster so happy? What happens that ruins the day for him?

### CHAPTERS 23 TO 45:

1. What positive things happen during Foster's visit to Montgomery? What does Foster's grandfather mean when he tells him he'll be okay?
2. Why does Foster want to stay at Fourmile? How does Gary disappoint him?
3. How is Dax a threatening figure? How is he also a coward?
4. How do the decisions made by Foster's mother, Gary, and Dax lead to the violent confrontation at the end of the novel?
5. How does the last chapter provide closure for the events of the story? Do you think it is good that Foster and Gary stop communicating with each other? Why or why not?

# COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

## Literary Techniques

Flashbacks and epilogues are literary devices authors use when crafting a narrative. Watt Key uses both in *Fourmile*. Have students, working in pairs, find examples of the use of these literary devices in the novel. Then ask them to write a brief explanation detailing how the flashbacks and the epilogue contribute to the narrative. Students should present their findings to the whole class during a class discussion.

## Written Response

Have students respond to the following prompt: Why do you think the author called this book *Fourmile*? What is the significance of home in this novel? Justify your response with specific details from the text.

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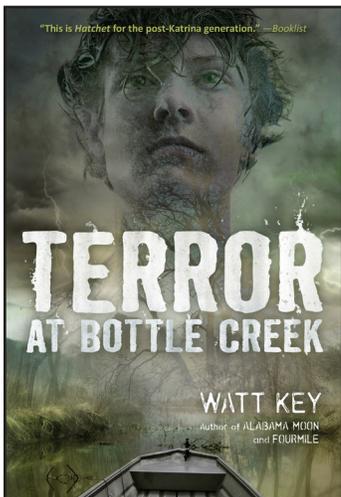
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CCSS.W.6.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.W.6.9a Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics").



HC 9780374374303 • PB 9781250104212  
Ages 10–13

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Thirteen-year-old Cort lives on the Alabama coast with his father, an expert on hunting and a swamp guide. His father has taught Cort everything he knows and often takes him on hunting trips with clients. When a deadly hurricane hits the area, Cort, his friend Liza, and her little sister Francie are unexpectedly left to face the storm on their own. After Francie runs out looking for Cort's dog, Cort and Liza set out searching for her. Through a series of catastrophic events, they find themselves isolated in the swamp, seeking high ground amid rising waters. To complicate matters, they are threatened by dangerous wild animals struggling to survive the storm, too. Cort must use all the skills his father has taught him to save their lives.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### CHAPTERS 1 TO 21:

1. What is Cort's dad's job? How does Cort help him with his work?
2. How does Cort feel about his mother? How does her leaving impact his life?
3. How is Cort's friendship with Liza an important part of his life?
4. How do Cort and his dad prepare for the upcoming hurricane? What happens that leaves Cort, Liza, and Francie to face the storm on their own?
5. After the loss of the houseboat, where does Cort decide to take Liza and Francie to wait out the storm? What do you think he means when he says, "I had a bad feeling that we were going to be up against more than just rising water"?

## CHAPTERS 22 TO 46:

1. What dangers do Cort, Liza, and Francie face in the swamp? How do Cort and Liza work together to save their lives?
2. During his struggles, Cort sometimes has conversations with his father in his head, asking for help or telling him how angry he is. What causes these feelings?
3. How does the bear prove to be an unlikely ally for Cort and the girls?
4. Early in the story, Cort's dad says about the swamp: "It's a pretty place, but you pull back the curtain and it gets evil real quick." How do Cort's experiences in the storm confirm this?
5. How is Cort able to think more clearly about his life after his ordeal in the storm? What does he decide is important to him?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### Research Project

In his Author's Note, Watt Key describes how this novel was an account of how he imagined things in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta during a hurricane. One of the locations in the book was the Bottle Creek Indian Mounds, where Cort takes the girls during the storm. Have students use print and online sources to do research on this archaeological site, including both geographical and historical information. Students should then make brief presentations of their reports to the class.

### Graphic Narrative

In *Terror at Bottle Creek*, Watt Key creates many detailed descriptions of the setting and the events of Cort's adventure. Discuss with students how these descriptions help the reader to visualize what is happening and make sense of the story. Explain that some authors use the graphic novel form when writing. Have students choose a chapter of the book they found particularly exciting and create a series of sequenced panels of the events in this chapter. They should include illustrations, speech balloons with dialogue from the story, and captions for their narration. Once completed these can be displayed in the classroom or compiled in a class book.

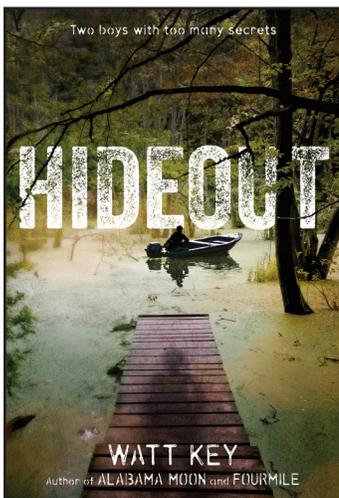
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CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

CCSS.W.6.9a Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics").



HC 9780374304829 • Ages 10–13

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Sam lives with his parents in the Mississippi bayou. His father, a policeman, gives Sam a new fishing boat. Instead of using it to fish, he decides to explore the forbidden swamps near his home. He unexpectedly finds a boy about his own age named Davey living in an abandoned fishing camp and decides to help him by bringing him food and supplies. He wants to be a friend to Davey, but becomes concerned about the boy's evasive answers as to why he's living by himself in the swamp. As Sam becomes more entangled in his efforts to help Davey, his lies to his parents grow. When Davey's stepbrother and his friends arrive at the camp, both Sam and Davey find themselves in great danger. Sam has to summon all his courage to save himself and Davey and deal with the problems in his own life.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## CHAPTERS 1 TO 15:

1. What motivates Sam to take his new boat deep into the swamp? What does he find there?
2. Why is Sam avoiding his friend Grover? Why does his new friendship with Davey tug at Sam's conscience?
3. Sam doesn't think he will ever be as good as his father is. Why does he think this?
4. Why doesn't Sam tell his dad and Officer Stockton about Davey? Do you think this is a good decision?
5. When Sam finds Davey after the storm, what does Davey finally tell him about why he won't leave the swamp?

## CHAPTERS 16 TO 28:

1. How does the mystery surrounding Davey grow even after he has told Sam more about his background? What questions does Sam have about Davey's life?
2. Why does Sam feel he is getting deeper and deeper into trouble? Is he following his mom's advice about making good decisions?
3. How are Sam and Davey retreating from their lives at the camp? Why do they each feel the need for a new life?
4. Do things improve for Davey and Sam when Davey's brother Slade returns to the camp? Why do you think Davey refuses to see Slade for what he is?
5. What advice does Sam's father give him about being a man? How does this advice lead to Sam's reconciling with Grover?

## CHAPTERS 29 TO 49:

1. How is the camp different when Sam returns to see how Davey is doing? What does Sam learn about Slade and his friends?
2. Why doesn't Sam escape from the swamp with Jesse when he has the chance? Why does he feel he's finally going to do the right thing?
3. How do Sam and Davey get out of the swamp? Why does Davey find it easier when he acknowledges the truth about his father and Slade?
4. How do Sam and Grover mend their friendship?
5. How does Davey choose a family to live with? What does Sam learn from Davey about life?

# COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

## Title Discussion

Watt Key chose to call his book *Hideout*. Have students reflect on the significance of this title. Ask them to consider the answers to each of the following questions:

- ◆ Why did Sam, Davey, and Grover each feel the need to have a place to hide away from the world? What does a hideout represent to each of them?
- ◆ Did their hideouts help them deal with the issues they were facing in their lives?

Have students work on their own and take notes on each of these questions, then share them in a full class or small-group discussions. Encourage students to respond to each speaker's argument and evaluate his/her reasoning.

## Written Analysis

Have students write a brief analysis of how the characters in *Hideout* respond or change in reaction to the events in the story. Ask them to explain how this leads to the final resolution of the conflict. Encourage students to use specific details about the plot, characters, and setting to support their responses.

CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.SL.6.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

CCSS.W.6.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.W.6.9a Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics").

# EXTENDING LEARNING

## Author Study

After they have read Watt Key's books, have students respond to the prompts listed below in their reading notebooks. Encourage them to cite specific evidence from the books to support their responses. Then have students share what they've written with classmates during full-class and small-group discussions.

- ❖ Visit Watt Key's website to learn about his life growing up in Alabama. How have his experiences influenced the books he writes, especially his plots and settings?
- ❖ Watt Key chose to write his books using a first-person narrative. Describe how experiencing a story through the point of view of the main character affects our reading of the book.
- ❖ A coming-of-age story is a genre of literature that focuses on the growth of the main character from child to adult. How is each of Watt Key's books a coming-of-age story? Choose one book and explain the crisis the main character faces and the lessons he learns. Tell how this influences his transition from child to young adult.
- ❖ Watt Key explores many themes in his books: surviving in hostile circumstances, good vs. evil, wilderness vs. civilization, outsider vs. belonging, isolation vs. the need for others, to name a few. Choose one of these themes and describe how it is developed in one or more of his books.
- ❖ What role does the father-son relationship play in each of Watt Key's books?
- ❖ On Watt Key's website, he lists his favorite books, including *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls. Read this book or one of the others on the list and compare it with one of Watt Key's books. What similarities and differences do you find in the themes, plots, characters, and settings?

CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.RL.6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.SL.6.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

CCSS.W.6.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

## Writing Workshop

Watt Key's books can be used as mentor texts during a unit on narrative writing.

- ❖ When working with students on creating vivid settings in their writing, read aloud the description of Sam's journey up the bayou in chapter 13 of *Hideout*. Ask students to explain how Watt Key described the setting in such a way that the reader can visualize it. Have students find other examples of vivid settings in his books and share them with the class. Have students revise a piece of their own writing to create a more descriptive setting.
- ❖ When working with students on the use of dialogue in their writing, provide students with a copy of chapter 19 from *Hideout*. Have them highlight the lines of dialogue between Sam and Davey. Discuss with students how the dialogue is used to reveal information about the characters and to develop the plot. Encourage them to use dialogue in their own writing for these purposes.
- ❖ When working with students on point of view, use the same chapter from *Hideout* to analyze how Sam's first-person narrative provides information about how he is feeling and interacting with others. Have students create or revise a piece of their writing so that it is written in a first-person narrative.

CCSS.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS. W.6.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 6 here.)

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Tell students that Watt Key’s books may contain vocabulary that is unknown to them. Explain that some of these words can be categorized as academic vocabulary, words that appear often in books across different content areas. Examples of academic vocabulary in Watt Key’s books include: *haul*, *enforced*, *attempted*, *periphery*, *ebbing*, *vastness*, and *stammer*.

Other words can be categorized as technical, or domain-specific, vocabulary. These words would be used in a specific subject area or in fictional narratives describing a particular activity or location. Examples of this type of vocabulary in Watt Key’s books include: *delta*, *skiff*, *jon boat*, *gunnels*, *sloughs*, and *palmetto*.

During reading, have students keep track of new words they come across. They should write these words in their notebooks under the category academic vocabulary or technical vocabulary. Then have them use the context to write what they think the words mean, using a dictionary to confirm or discount their definitions.

CCSS.L.6.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.L.6.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

This guide was written by Barbara McLaughlin, M.Ed., M.A., literacy consultant and former Senior Program Director for Elementary ELA in the Boston Public Schools.